

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1974</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 6, 1974	" — About The Gift's"	Matthew 2:11
January 13, 1974	"Saint Luke: A Colony of Heaven"	Philippians 3:20
January 20, 1974	Meditation	
February 3, 1974	"Remaining Resources"	Revelation 3:2
February 3, 1974	Meditation	
February 10, 1974	"Turnabout"	
February 17, 1974	"Of A Fault And A Forgiveness"	Philemon 15
February 24, 1974	"On Being Quietly Confident"	Isaiah 30:15
March 3, 1974	"A Man Named Peter"	
March 10, 1974	"A Man Named Andrew"	John 1:42
March 14, 1974	"A Man Named John"	John 19:26
March 24, 1974	"A Man Named Matthew"	
March 31, 1974	"A Man Named Judas"	John 18
April 12, 1974	Meditation Of The Seven Words From The Cross	
April 14, 1974		
April 28, 1974	"To Be Used By God"	II Timothy 2:21
May 5, 1974	"The Set of The Soul"	Acts 1:25
May 19, 1974	"On Getting To Know God"	Job 22:21
May 26, 1974	"A Sermon For Memorial Day Sunday"	Deut. 30:19-20
June 2, 1974	Meditation	

<u>1974- continued</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
June 9, 1974	"1974 Saint Luke Baccalaureate"	
June 9, 1974	"In The Light OF Common Day"	
June 16, 1974	"The End Of All—"	
June 16, 1974		
June 23, 1974	"To Flee From Fear"	I John 4:18
June 30, 1974	"America-And God's Mercy"	
July 9, 1974		Mark 4:35-41
July 14, 1974	"How The Story Ended"	Luke 15:20
July 28, 1974	"The Risk-Taker"	
August 4, 1974	"I Am The Way---"	
August 11, 1974	"To Learn To Pray--"	
August 18, 1974	"Why Are You So Fearful--?"	Mark 4:40
August 25, 1974	God's Glory In The Morning"	
September 1, 1974	"To Work To God's Glory"	
September 29, 1974	"And Always The Enemy"	
October 13, 1974	"Praise Ye The Lord" or "Something To Sing About"	
October 20, 1974	"Another Harvest—"	
October 27, 1974	"What have You Been Doing Lately?"	
November 10, 1974	"Saints—Beware!"	
November 17, 1974	"Where Two Or Three—"	Matthew 18:20

<u>1974- continued</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
November 24, 1974	"The Possibility Which Is Paradise"	
December 1, 1974		John 1:18
December 8, 1974	"The Day That's Before Us"	Romans 13:12-13
December 15, 1974	"Push And Pull"	
December 22, 1974	"A Gift For All Seasons"	
December 24, 1974	To Care Enough"	John 3:16

1974

November 17 - Pentecost XXIV

"WHERE TWO OR THREE - - "
(Matthew 18:20)

November 24 - Christ The King

"THE POSSIBILITY WHICH IS PARADISE"
(Luke 23:43)

December 1 - Communion Meditation
Advent I

December 8 - Advent II

"THE DAY THAT'S BEFORE US"
(Romans 13:11,12)

December 15 - Advent III

"PUSH AND PULL"
(Romans 13:11,12)

December 22 - Advent IV

"A GIFT FOR ALL SEASONS"

December 24 - Christmas Eve

"TO CARE ENOUGH"
(John 3:16)

1975 January 5 - Christmas II

"GIVE - - AND TAKE"
(Matthew 7:1)

January 12 - Epiphany I

"COLONY OF HEAVEN" (Anniversary Sunday)
(Phillipians 3:20)

January 26 - Epiphany III

"GIVE AND TAKE" -- II
(Matthew 7:1)

February 2 - Presentation of Our
Lord

"WHATEVER YOU DO - - "

February 9 - Transfiguration

"DIVINE PERSPECTIVE"

February 16 - Lent I

"LIFE IS A 3-D AFFAIR"
(Luke 18:1)

March 2 - Lent III

"I AM - - THE GOOD SHEPHERD"
(John 10:11)

SERMONS Preached in Saint Luke Lutheran Church
by the Rev. Dr. Raymond Shaheen, Pastor

1974

July 14 - Pentecost VI

"HOW THE STORY ENDED - - "
(Luke 15: 20)

July 28 - Pentecost VIII

"THE RISK-TAKER"
(Luke 10:25-37)

August 4 - Pentecost IX

"I AM THE WAY - - "

August 11 - Pentecost X

"TO LEARN TO PRAY - - "
(Luke 11:1)

August 18 - Pentecost XI

"WHY ARE YOU SO FEARFUL - - ?"
(Mark 4:40)

August 25 - Pentecost XII

"GOD'S GLORY IN THE MORNING"

September 1 - Pentecost XIII

"TO WORK TO GOD'S GLORY"
(Corinthians 10:31)

September 29 - St. Michael and
All Angels

"AND ALWAYS THE ENEMY"
(Luke 10:18)

October 13 - Festival of Praise

"PRAISE YE THE LORD" ("Something to Sing About")
(Psalm 146:1,2)

October 20 - Festival of Harvest

"ANOTHER HARVEST - - "
(Galatians 5:22)

October 27 - Reformation Sunday

"WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING LATELY?"

November 3 - All Saints' Sunday
(Dialogue Sermon)

"NOW CONCERNING THE COLLECTION - - "
(I Corinthians 16:1)

November 10 - Pentecost XXIII

"SAINTS - BEWARE!"
(Luke 18:9-14)

Sermons

1974

APRIL	12	Good Friday Meditations 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.	<u>MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN WORDS</u>
	14	Easter Day	<u>LIFE GOES ON - TRIUMPHANTLY</u> (John 14:)
	28	Third Sunday of Easter	<u>"TO BE USED BY GOD"</u> (2 Timothy 2:21)
MAY	5	Fourth Sunday of Easter	<u>"THE SET OF THE SOUL"</u> (Acts 1:25)
	19	Sixth Sunday of Easter	<u>"ON GETTING TO KNOW GOD"</u> (Job 22:21)
	26	Seventh Sunday of Easter	<u>"A SERMON FOR MEMORIAL DAY SUNDAY"</u> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20) (Read into the <u>Congressional Record</u>)
JUNE	2	Pentecost	Communion Meditation
	9	Saint Luke Baccalaureate at Vespers - 5:00 p.m.	Message recorded for service by R.S.
	9	<u>"IN THE LIGHT OF COMMON DAY"</u> - Sermon preached on the occasion marking the 50th anniversary of the Ordination of the Rev. Pastor J. Ray Houser	
	16	Pentecost 2	<u>"THE END OF ALL - - "</u> (K Peter 4:7)
	16	Sermon preached on the occasion of the Ordination service for Charles Mercer Zimmerman	
	23	Pentecost 3	<u>"TO FLEE FROM FEAR"</u> (I John 4:18)
	30	Pentecost 4	<u>AMERICA - AND GOD'S MERCY</u> (Psalm 67)
JULY	9	SERMON...based on Mark 4:35-41, and delivered at the Communion Service, evening of July 9, 1974 LCA CONVENTION IN BALTIMORE.	

SERMONS Preached by
THE REV. RAYMOND SHAHEEN, D.D.
in Saint Luke Lutheran Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

1974

JANUARY	6	Epiphany	<u>" . . . ABOUT THE GIFTS"</u> (Matthew 2:11)
	13	Anniversary Sunday	<u>"SAINT LUKE: A COLONY OF HEAVEN"</u> (Philippians 3:20)
	20	Epiphany 2	<u>Communion Meditation</u>
FEBRUARY	3	Epiphany 4	<u>"REMAINING RESOURCES"</u> (Revelation 3:2) <u>"First Communion" Meditation</u>
	10	Epiphany 5	<u>"TURNABOUT"</u> (John 3:5)
	17	Epiphany 6	<u>"OF A FAULT AND A FORGIVENESS"</u> (Philemon 15)
	24	Transfiguration	<u>"ON BEING QUIETLY CONFIDENT"</u> (Isaiah 30:15)
MARCH	3	Lent I	<u>"A MAN NAMED PETER"</u> (John 1:42)
	10	Lent II	<u>"A MAN NAMED ANDREW"</u> (John 1:42)
	17	Lent III	<u>"A MAN NAMED JOHN"</u> (John 19:26)
	24	Lent IV	<u>"A MAN NAMED MATTHEW"</u> (Matthew 9:9)
	31	Lent V	<u>"A MAN NAMED JUDAS"</u> (John 18)

" - - - ABOUT THE GIFTS"

THE TWELFTH Day, O God, is upon
us. The season passes quickly.
Perhaps today once more for a little
while we can capture anew the meaning
of what did happen when Your Son came
to us personally. Amen.

If it's a text that you'll be wanting, let me announce it now. It comes from the Gospel that was read for this Sunday which marks the Epiphany of our Blessed Lord, the second chapter of Matthew, the eleventh verse. The reference is to the travelers who came a great distance to pay homage to Jesus Christ. Frequently they are referred to as Wise Men, or as Magi, or the Three Kings:

"Then they opened their treasures and presented
unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Babies don't ask questions. Children do. And the child that remains in the heart of every man never quite has done with the asking of questions. It may be a bit of embarrassment, of course it is, when someone comes to visit in a home, and particularly if that person who comes to visit is somebody who has been away on a journey - - and while that person was away on a journey the youngster in the home has heard the parents speak of where he had gone, the places he had visited, the things that he might have seen . . . and then maybe the youngster himself had gone with his parents to greet that person upon his return, and they couldn't help but notice how heavily-laden he was at the airport, or at the bus terminal -- the suitcases filled with not only his clothing but hopefully souvenirs that he had brought back with him. So when the person comes to visit babies don't ask questions -- children do -- and in-

variably, much to the embarrassment of the parent -- "What did you bring me?"

The child that remains in the heart of every man, well it was characterized all over again when you looked at those packages under the Christmas tree twelve days ago. You and I waited our turn, wondering what it is that might bear our name, eagerly unwrapping the package . . . what is it? what did you bring me? And then sometimes the question is also asked, once we discover that it is ours, "What shall I do with it?" -- particularly if it's something that is new, strange and unfamiliar to us. Babies don't ask questions - - children do . . . "What did you bring me?" - - "What shall I do with it?"

It's not too much to suggest that you might use your sanctified imagination now and try to picture as best you can Mary, the mother of our Blessed Lord, nestling not the Baby Jesus but the Child Jesus in her lap, holding Him in her arms. Now no longer a baby but a child, Jesus says, "Mommy, tell it to me again!" - - of course she was the one who related the story of those strange happenings on that strange night! How else would He have known? Who was in a better position to tell Him than Mary, His mother? And so as before, like as not, she told Him about shepherds who heard angels sing, how they came to the place where He was born. . . .

. . . and then the wonderment crept into His eyes when she said, "And after a while there were people who came who had traveled a great distance! - - I really don't know how far they traveled, but they came from far, far away. When they came, they knelt down in front of you and me. They didn't say anything. They didn't ask any questions! They simply knelt -- offered a prayer. And then they opened their treasures and they brought you some gifts - - "

...the dark-eyed, olive-skinned boy with wonderment in His eyes looked up into the eyes of His mother and says -- yes He did! -

-- permit yourself to believe it! - - -

"Mommy, what did they bring me?".....and she said, "They brought you gold, frankincense and myrrh."

....As He grew older, He might have asked her also, "Mommy, what did you do with those gifts that they brought me?"

Some years back I got a very uncomfortable feeling when a friend came to visit us in our little place in the hills of home. No sooner had she crossed the threshold than her eyes went from wall to wall and corner to corner in the room. I was uncomfortable at first because I felt she was ill, she came in such a dazed manner, so it seemed. Then it occurred to me. She was an artist, and she had painted a scene especially for us and had it framed. And months before she had given it to us. Now, you see what was happening -- she was paying the visit by special design, wondering what we had done with it -- hoping, of course, to see it adorning the wall some place in a prominent position . . .

..."Mommy," says the Child Jesus to Mary, His mother - -

"what did you do with those gifts they brought me?"

Why don't you speculate. Gold, the precious coin. What couldn't she have done with that for Him, what couldn't He have done with it, poor peasant girl that she was? - - precious gold in front of her . . .

- - she could have used it to buy Him one brand new outfit after another maybe . . .

- - she could have put it aside, and then used it to pay the tuition in the School of the Rabbis, where this child might learn precious religious truth.....maybe

that's what she did with this precious gold coin

- - maybe, who knows, she put it aside, to say, "One day, as my son grows up, he should go to Jerusalem all by himself. There's much to see, there's much to do, and I'll set the coin aside for his use against that day . . . "

"Mommy, what did you do with the gold?" Who knows! Maybe she kept it until the day when He could have His own donkey and His own donkey-cart . . .

...wait now, one more suggestion if you don't mind -- maybe she kept it for Him so that one day, apprentice to Joseph, the master-carpenter, with that gold coin He could buy His own set of tools, and His own tool box! Who knows!

...."What did you do with it?" Gold was meant to be used. How do you suppose it was spent?

"What did they bring me?" . . . she also said, "Frankincense - - " And how was frankincense used? They tell us that it was used by the priest, in the rituals - - - "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as the evening sacrifice" . . . and then in ancient Jewish ritual the incense would be burned. And as it ascended heavenward the prayers of the faithful were meant to ascent toward the Throne of Grace

"What did you do with it, Mommy?" Well maybe Mary said, "The very first time that you went to the temple I carried it along with me, and I said to the priest, 'Use it -- especially today -- let the prayers of the faithful ascend in behalf of this child whom God has given to me' . . . "

- - maybe she kept it against that day when He was driven from the synagogue, and then in no uncertain way the sword that pierced her heart, Mary was given to understand that this child-of-hers-now-become-man would be dealt with cruelly because it was a

wicked world He had to face. Maybe on that day she was driven to the temple and she said to the priest, "Please, today is the day you use this frankincense -- today he needs to be surrounded by the arms of prayer as never before!" - - - who knows!

"Mommy, what did they bring me?"

"Gold," she said.

"Frankincense," she said.

"Myrrh."

"Mommy, what is myrrh?"

Well, I had to refresh my own memory. So last night or early this morning I checked out my dictionary . . . it's resin from the forest, that's what it is. And in the Middle East and in East Africa there's a particular tree, of the balsam species, its bark and its wood is odiferous, and you can draw the resin from this type of tree. It's really a drug. As an ingredient it was part of the anointing oils that were used to anoint the dead and to embalm the bodies of the dead. I have no trouble speculating with what was done with the gold that was brought to Jesus.....I have no trouble speculating with what was done with the frankincense that was brought to Him. But I'm about to suggest to you that nothing much was ever done with myrrh. It was a drug.

Scripture reminds us how Jesus Christ refused, in the time of His anguish, hanging upon the cross, when myrrh was offered to Him -- you can read it for yourself - - - He would not allow the pain to be taken away from His anguish because He came to identify Himself fully with us. Men cannot take pain away. Men find ways by which to relieve themselves of the pain. But not so Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came into the world to be sensitive to our need, not insensitive. Jesus Christ made the divine invasion, He came to us, to be with us, to taste

all of life with us to the full, to experience reality - - - not to escape from it, not to retreat, not to withdraw. And so I must say to you, as I understand it, it could well be that the gift of myrrh was never used.

In an age such as ours that relies so heavily upon the use of drugs in order to escape reality, in order to have the burden of life taken away, if only for a little while, we do well to remember the example of Jesus Christ. We happen to live in a world that is very real. We happen to live in a world that can be very painful. We also happen to live in a world where there's always going to be a tomorrow morning, and the day after! And if I understand the mind and the mood of Jesus Christ aright, He did not set before us an example that says: withdraw! - - retreat! - - escape from reality in whatever way that you can!

Yesterday in the quiet corner of this place that's known as the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, I sat with one of our parishioners, for a little while, who had a burden -- the burden of being misunderstood. There are younger folk of her acquaintance who scoff at her for coming back to this place Sunday after Sunday. She has made known to them that here within these sacred walls she receives a measure of peace, the burden of the responsibilities of the week is eased. And when she is stained by sin she receives here the assurance that God loves her and her sins are forgiven....

....her younger friends can be very cruel. They say to her, quoting another, "Religion for you is just an opiate -- it's a drug - - it allows you just for one hour to enter an unreal world!"

..."What can I say to them, Pastor? I can't live without this hour in the week that I spend within the shadow of the altar of Saint Luke!" - - that was her sentiment - - "They're all wrong!" - - - that was the gist of her conversa-

tion - - "If it weren't for what I receive here I couldn't face the real world! I'm made strong - - " (it wasn't her exact verbiage, but I'll

say it for her)

" - - I'm empowered by the Holy Spirit through that hour and I can go back and face the burdens, and the pain, and the wickedness."

I have little patience with people who allow themselves to believe that religion is an opiate. According to the mind and the manner and the mood of Jesus Christ, He faced life head-on. That's why He came, you see -- to be our guide, to be the Way, to be our Saviour.

"Mommy, what did they bring me?"

"Gold. Frankincense. And myrrh."

"What did you do with them, Mommy?"

....I think she had an answer for the gold.

....I think she had an answer for the frankincense.

....but by the time He died He didn't need an answer for the myrrh. And that's why I can say to you now:

The peace of God, which passes all
understanding, keep your hearts and
minds through Christ Jesus.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen

First Sunday After The Epiphany - Anniversary Sunday - January 13, 1974

"SAINT LUKE: A COLONY OF HEAVEN"

Text: "We are a colony of Heaven . . "
(Philippians 3:20)

O GOD, on this day accept our gratitude
for every servant of the Word who stood
at a sacred desk and proclaimed to Your
people in this Congregation Your Gospel.
Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord.
Amen.

First, the text. Tuck it away in your mind. We will be coming back to it a bit later. It's the 20th verse of the 3rd chapter of the Letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a group of Christians who lived in Philippi. I'll give you Moffet's translation if you don't mind -- it's a very good one: "You are a colony of Heaven."

Now keep that text in the back of your mind.

Now let me tell you, if you don't mind, that when we broke up the home in which my father and mother had lived, after they had finished their earthly pilgrimage, the six of us considered ourselves fortunate if we could take with us this item or that item. For naturally every child is a sentimentalist of sorts, no matter what his age may be. And each one of us might prize one thing in particular that would hold us in good stead as we looked back and remembered the impressionable years that we had spent under the gracious influence of our parents. There is one thing that I am sorry that I never got, and for this moment I don't know where it went. It was my father's needle. Now that deserves an explanation, of course it does.

My father, as some of you know, came from the old country, and when he came to these shores he earned an honest day's livelihood by being a peddler.

He would walk from village to village with a suitcase in either hand, supported by a leather strap over his shoulders. Those suitcases contained handkerchiefs and shoe laces and notions. By the time he died he had progressed to the place where he was selling perfectly beautiful antique Oriental rugs.

Now occasionally one of his customers would ask him to repair a rug, and I can see my father seated on the floor, tailor-fashion, with the rug creeping around all sides, and there with a needle in his hand -- a needle longer than his longest finger, made of good steel, and he would use that to repair or to restore the rug.

Now when I look back and remember how he did that, I also think of another man who had a needle in his hand, who lived in the same part of the world from which my dad came. That man happened to have been the Apostle Paul, and he gained an honest day's livelihood going around from place to place, even though he was a preacher, by mending tents. And as I come to this sacred desk this morning I am thinking of how he might have been seated on the floor, or the ground, mending a tent.....and he may have said "Ouch!" as the needle pricked his finger or his thumb, because he wasn't keeping his eye completely on his business.

He had one eye on what was happening across the street. For in all likelihood across the street was the Roman garrison in Philippi, and a new contingent of Roman colonists had come to Philippi. And as the tent-mender with his needle in hand was repairing that tent, he was reflecting on what was happening.

Now -- put a pin in that for the moment. I've got to refresh your mind historically. And what I am about to tell you at this point may seem almost incredible to you. But there was a time when the Roman Empire stretched

all the way from the North Sea to the Sahara, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Euphrates River. Augustus, the first Emperor, realized that he had a problem on his hand. It wasn't simply enough to conquer these people, and to bring them within the realm, but once they were conquered they had to be held together by the marvelous force of what was the spirit and the mind of the Roman people. He knew that. So what did he do? Very cleverly, he would choose certain people -- very deliberately -- and then he'd assign them to certain outposts or certain places where they would go and live for a certain period of time. For his empire, you see, embraced a variety of cultures and traditions and legends and languages. Now, how to bring them into the spirit of Rome? -- and how to have Rome's spirit permeate into their lives? Very simple procedure: -- he simply, deliberately, chose certain people and then he put them down here and he put them down there and he said, "Here is where you live. And when you live there, you must never forget, you live as a Roman citizen" . . . he had his little colonies spread throughout the empire.

Now, let's get back to the tent-mender and his needle.

As Paul is busy repairing that tent, with his eye on the new people from Rome coming to be established in that garrison, recognizing that they are colonists from Rome, he reflected upon the Christian community, and he says to the Christians: "You are a colony of Heavey -- especially chosen by Christ to be His representatives, to live according to His life-style, that it might permeate the community round about you."

Now as I come to this sacred desk on this Anniversary Sunday I have been hard-pressed to find some new thing to tell you, because for the most part I have been coming here now on eighteen different Anniversary Sundays, to share with you the Gospel message for this particular day. And I am grateful that this is the text that does not allow my mind to pass from it -- it continues

to claim me. Moffet's way of translating the 20th verse of the 3rd chapter of what Paul had to write to those Christians who lived in Philippi: "You are a colony of Heaven." . . . and this I say to you with all the strength that I can command is what Saint Luke Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, in the mind of God is meant to be: A Colony of Heaven.

I hope you won't mind when I tell you that it was rather a traumatic experience for me when I came down from the hills of home to be your Pastor. Surely you know by this time that I grew up in a small town, I married a country girl, my first parish was in a community that numbered forty thousand people....and then at 40 years of age to be exposed to metropolitan living, to become the Pastor of a parish in suburbia. Not long after I was here I was asked to prepare a paper on "The Mission of the Church in Suburbia" - - and in the preparation of that paper it occurred to me -- oh, perhaps you won't like me to tell you -- that the church in suburbia is surrounded by pagan influences...we have what sometimes can be referred to as a "paganized culture." I suppose I could document that for you, if you of all people needed to have it documented....

...and eventually looked upon myself coming here with the same degree of Christian vocation and commitment as a missionary goes to the Far East, to Africa and to India.....surrounded as we are by paganized influences.

Which allows me to think now as never before, that this is an apt descriptive for Saint Luke Lutheran Church, and any other Christian community in this area - - - we are colonies, established by God, colonies of Heaven, meant to introduce into our culture the Christian life-style just as those Roman colonists were meant to introduce Rome's life-style in the society of which they were part.

Now let me share with you several characteristics of the Christian Church

which can be seen as a colony of Heaven - -

One, the people who live within the colony of Heaven are chosen, just as the Emperor chose those colonists to go out.....

You ought to allow yourself to believe this quite earnestly. Any single person who is a member of the Christian Church is one who has been called. Martin Luther is absolutely right when he looks upon one of the works of the Holy Spirit: to gather people together, to enlighten them, and to bring them -- the word from which we get 'church' is 'ecclesia' which means "called out" -- chosen -- selected.

It comes to some people as quite a surprise, in the New Members Group, when they meet for the first time, to have me tell them that they ought to recognize this truth: that they happen to be in that room where the New Members Group is meeting because they're responding to God's call. It wasn't just the invitation from the secretary of the Committee on Membership, or the Chairman of the Committee on Membership, or the fact that you, God bless your soul! -- did take time to bring them or to call them on the phone and encourage them to come -- -- these are but the instruments that God uses. But basically, when we come together in God's name, we come together because we are responding to God's call.

And every time you come to a worship service -- why not call it by its rightful name! -- you're responding to God's claim, you're responding to God's call to you. And by the same token, every time you stay away, and every time you allow yourself to be on the periphery, you're ignoring God's call to you. For the Church, properly understood, is made up of those whom God calls, whom God elects, whom God chooses. We are the chosen ones. Allow yourself the tonic of a wholesome pride in seeing yourself as one who has been called and selected. That's what the colony is, this colony of Saint Luke Church and every other Christian group.

of
And the second characteristic/that colony is that you are being nurtured

and sustained. Every time you come together within this colony, whether you recognize it or not, you are being sustained and nurtured, you are being strengthened, not only by what you receive when the Word is proclaimed and when the Sacraments are offered, but also the inspiration that you get from others who come together. And all of this is simply to say that when this happens it happens because we are allowing the Eternal Dimension to prevail. Every time we come together, together we are in contact with home base, which, if you please, is Heaven itself.

Whenever we have been able to travel abroad, and I remember particularly that trip around the world, and we had the good fortune to visit with people who came from United States embassies, in whatever subtle way that I could, I tried to find out just how it was that they kept in touch with the State Department back here in Washington. They never would divulge it completely. But the answer was always this, in one form or another, "Well let's say we keep in touch constantly."

...Rome was constantly keeping in touch with its outposts. Rome was always in touch with its colonies. It was a distinguishing characteristic, you see. And a distinguishing characteristic of this colony which is Saint Luke Church, which is a colony of Heaven, is that again and ever so often we keep ourselves in contact with our home base, which permits us our distinguishing characteristic -- to reflect the Christian life-style in the culture and the community of which we are a part. And here when we come together we are constantly being indoctrinated and sustained.

I finished reading yesterday morning -- it doesn't take long to read it, a book that bears the title: "In the Presence of Mine Enemies." Harris and Betty Gustafson are giving it to the library here at Saint Luke because

Harris, who's recently retired as a Commander of the United States Navy, knew personally the man, the main person in this book, Capt. Howard Rutledge, who for seven years was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, five of which were spent in solitary confinement. I give you fair warning, if any of you, from this moment on, ever find me complaining about any annoyance or inconvenience, take me to task when I read what he endured for seven years, it is well-nigh incredible. It's a marvelous testimony to the Christian faith. For, you see, when they were in imprisonment -- not even knowing who the American might be in the cell-block alongside him, above him, or below him, yet realizing that it was an American, they were able to devise the most ingenious methods of communication....

...and what did they communicate? -- God be praised! -- verses of Scripture!....the stanza of a Gospel hymn -- something that came back to him as he remembered his days in that Baptist church in Tulsa, Oklahoma....

I thought to myself as I read the book and put it aside, sooner or later all of us find ourselves in one way or another imprisoned by life and the forces that come to bear against us. And the one thing that makes us free within that imprisonment is the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

That's what happens within this colony of Heaven -- we're being nurtured and sustained and strengthened against those forces that would take us captive. For somewhere in that book he had a great moment when it occurred to him that when he went to talk about the presence of God, he could talk about the presence of God right there in that stinking dungeon, that hell-hole. God was there as God was anywhere. And he said he must always remember that he had to begin at that point. So I say to you, in a world that surrounds us with wicked influences, within this colony of Heaven which is Saint Luke Church --

God is here, and everywhere, where He has chosen people such as He has chosen us.

Now the third characteristic of the colony of Heaven is that when they were put somewhere, they were meant then to scatter into the community, they were not meant to live within the garrison. They went and they dealt in the market-place, and as often as possible they had their children attend the schools in the community. So you and I, in this colony of Heaven which is Saint Luke Church, once the Benediction is pronounced, cannot huddle up and stay here. For a free translation of the Benediction could be: -- "Get with it, now! -- go on! -- you can't stay here! You have got to go out and scatter yourselves and to live as effective witnesses, according to the life-style of the Christian ⁱⁿ ~~and~~ the culture and the community of which you are part!"

So on this Anniversary Sunday I am happy to remind you of what you are, - - - oh, I am willing to admit that there might be a great gap between what God thinks we ought to be and what we actually are. But then let's constantly endeavor to measure up to what God wants us to be: a colony of Heaven....

....it's as wonderful as all that!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen

First, the text for this brief meditation on this Communion Sunday.
It is written in the Good Book as the words of Jesus Christ:

"A new command I give unto you, that you love
one another, even as I love you."

Now if you don't mind, let me tell you again a story that you've doubtless heard before. It deserves to be heard repeatedly. And I can readily understand if once you've heard it, you recognize the humor in it and you might chuckle a bit....

....really, he was a rascal, and most of the people in the village knew it. But now that the doctor had seen him, sick as he was, he got the word that he wasn't long for this world any more. It could be a matter of days, it could be a matter of hours....
...strangely moved, the old rascal instructed one member of his family to go out into the community and to bring to his room those people whom he had defrauded, or with whom he had very difficult and strained relationships....it was common knowledge.

....So they were herded together and they came into his room. And then this man, presumably nigh unto death, slowly and with bated breath said something to them in this manner:

"I have cheated you, and you know it. I ask you to
forgive me."

...and then slowly, with more measured words --

" - - for all the dirty tricks that I pulled on you, I

ask you to forgive me, even as I forgive you all the things you did against me . . . "

...naturally they were deeply moved by what they heard. It was strange behavior. Then they began slowly to walk away and to leave the room, but as they neared the door there was a strange startling surge of spirit in the old codger, and he raised himself up with almost supernatural breath, and he said,

" - - just a minute! - - but if by any chance I get better, the whole thing's off! - - "

Beyond the humor, of course, is the fallacy of allowing ourselves to believe that forgiveness is something that belongs to the angels, that this is the life-style for those who are nearer to God specifically in Heaven but that right down here on earth forgiveness is not expected to be a way of life, realistic as we are. And so more than one person perhaps falls in the pattern of the old codger, who in the prospect of Judgment and the prospect of the life to come is willing to subscribe to forgiveness, if it's to be practiced in Heaven, but he's not so sure it's to be the way of life here on earth.

Very shortly you and I will be going to the altar of the Lord to receive the Holy Communion. We Lutherans make much of the fact that in the Sacrament Jesus Christ is really present, truly present. That's a great notion. It's a marvelous fact. Recognize this when I tell it to you now: suppose we would have to believe that Jesus Christ was only really present when He lived here on this earth in the flesh, that only the people in Galilean Judea actually knew him, and felt His presence, and knew Him to be real . . . or the other end of the spectrum, that only after you and I have run our course on this

earth and hopefully die and go to Heaven, that we will really get to know Jesus Christ. Wouldn't it be a sad thing if we had to subscribe to either one of these ideas -- that either His presence was in the past, or His presence is something yet to come?

...we Lutherans make much of the fact -- let me repeat it -- that in the Sacrament Jesus Christ is really, truly present -- now!

Scripture is chuck-full with references to the nearness of God. You cherish this one, don't you -- "Where two or three are gathered together, you can count on me being there" -- (that's a free translation, you know the proper one)....

....or that other magnificent statement of our Lord himself:

"I will never leave you! Lo, I am with you always."

...that's something more than way back there then.....that's something more than in some happy day yet to come! It means right now.

Now, put these two things together -- the story of the rascal and the fact that Jesus Christ is truly present as we come to receive the Sacrament, and the command that He gave to us, that we love one another -- now..... that this whole business of loving and forgiving is not something that we begin to practice years hence, or even reserve it for the prospect of Heaven. As you and I come to receive the Sacrament Jesus Christ enters into our hearts, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit empowers us and enables us to live the life of those who are forgiven, and to love one another right now.

So I have a suggestion for you, if you don't mind, a suggestion that comes out of an expression that we borrow from our Roman Catholic brethren, and I dare say it's a very good expression: the Roman Catholic tradition reference is made to people making a 'good Communion' -- that's the way it's put -- people

are encouraged to make a "good Communion."

What in the world do you suppose they mean by that? I'm going to hazard an opinion. I think it means that you make a good Communion only after you have prepared for it, you are truly contrite for your sins, you have asked to be forgiven, you've received absolution.....then you come to receive the Sacrament.

But that does not make it a complete Communion, that does not make it a good Communion yet. To make it a good Communion, then you have to live, once you've received the Sacrament, according to the spirit of Jesus Christ -- as one who has been forgiven. You live it now -- that's what makes a good Communion.

Now the suggestion. You may not have to think very far, and you may not have to probe the recesses of your mind, deep as they may be, to think of someone from whom you have been alienated, and perhaps before the day ends, or the week begins, you might offer to that person the spirit of forgiveness -- today. Then you can have the assurance that you've made a good Communion.

To forgive does not necessarily mean that you have to approve, but it can mean that by the grace of God you would free your own spirit of hatred, and hostility, and alienation . . . and by the grace of God you would ask for reconciliation. Then you can be assured, my friend, that you have made a good Communion. And that's why I can say to you:

"The peace of God that passes all understanding

keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"REMAINING RESOURCES"
(Revelation 3:2)

O GOD, For our own sake we need once
more to tell You again what You already
know: We make so little time to do this
sort of thing that we're about to do
now, to give some measure of undivided
attention to Your Word. That we should
make the most of it, we would like Your
Holy Spirit to help us. Amen.

Not everyone looked upon him as a cynic, but every now and then when he was called upon to give a review of the plays, the cynic in his blood came out full and free, perhaps never more so than when the readers of his articles read this opening line: "I viewed it from a disadvantageous position - - I was facing the stage." The implication is that he was able to see what was going on, and he didn't much like what he happened to have seen. I can't tell you whether the play was mis-cast -- I can't tell you whether it was poorly produced. But I am assuming that as the play progressed, and as he was in full view of everything that was going on, he didn't much care for certain elements that were introduced before the finale.

By that same token, as I stand at this sacred desk, there are some people who take a cynical view of life because they happen to be in a position where they have a full view of all that's going on. And before the curtain drops at the end they don't much like all that they're called upon to see.

Now brace yourself if you don't mind: some of us have lived long enough to recognize that before the curtain will drop we'll be called upon

to look at, inescapably so, the hand that stretches forth itself, robs, murders, consistently wrongs people. Sooner or later, somewhere, someone takes away certain things that we cherish....

...maybe our good name

...maybe our good position

...maybe someone that we love very dearly

...life has a way of doing this. Life, so it seems, can turn robber.

If you're young, you may not be able to appreciate this sermon, because when one is young he's climbing, he's reaching, he's gathering, he's accumulating. But then there may come the plateau period in life, when one no longer gathers and accumulates. And after the plateau there is the frightful thought that some people have to face, that there's the downward slope, the period of diminishing returns, when more and more things seem to be taken away. Now if this should ever happen to you, or if you have the prospect that it could happen to you, then this sermon is meant for you. There are some people who have reached the stage in life today where they say they see nothing but despair, defeat, and who are a disillusioned people.

Not so long ago, I can't tell you just when it was, but there was a church convention being held in the city of Milwaukee. And just before they adjourned in the morning the presiding officer said, "I am about to introduce a strange new element for our agenda this afternoon. We will not come back to the meeting hall after lunch. In fact, we will not come back here again until after dinner tonight. But instead of coming back here and having a conference and workshops and lectures, all of us who are delegates to this conference will be asked to walk the streets of Milwaukee, and look for any ray of hope that they may find in someone or something. And then tonight when we come back we'll have a sharing experience, and we'll talk to one

another about the things that we saw that we can call hopeful."

Now how salutary you might find such an experiment I don't quite know, but I am willing to believe that you've had your moments when you'd be willing to try it, because you are surrounded by all that's depressive and oppressive. Now what is there that one ought to do when life turns robber and when things are being taken away? There is a text for this sermon -- it's from that rather-hard-to-understand Book, the last Book in the Bible. But surprisingly enough, you ought not to find this text from that Book difficult to appreciate. It's the second verse of the third chapter of the Book of the Revelation. God's spokesman is making plain what he wants a certain city and a church in that city to hear. The city happens to be Sardis, the capital city of Lydia in Asia Minor.....

...it is no longer as it once was.....its glory has passed away....it's in a period of diminishing return. And the same thing can be said for the church in that city as well as the community itself. And this is rather an embarrassing thing for the Church of Jesus Christ, that it should no longer be as once it was. So God's spokesman exhorts them in plain, unvarnished language by saying, "Your job right now, in the face, if you please, of diminishing returns, is to strengthen what remains."

Now with all the strength that I can command I come to this sacred desk to say to you that that's excellent advice. When life turns robber, what ought you to do? You strengthen what remains. The text immediately, as you look at it, tells you two things:

One, the very precious implication, there will always be something

that's left . . .

...and the second implication is that you zero in on what's left, you concentrate on it, and you make the most of it.

Invariably when I walk from 919 Highland Drive, the Parsonage of your Senior Pastor and his family, here to the church, I walk by a bed of transplanted rose bushes. They're not the healthiest-looking rose bushes in the world right now, and I'm quite sure that Rudy Coldenstroth, who was kind enough last year to come and trim them, might take another look at them this year at the proper time. And when he does, in all likelihood he'll cut away on all that's gone....he'll very wisely try not to waste his time or his energy on the branches and the stalk that's absolutely dead! But what will the good pruner do? He concentrates on what's promising, and he nurses that along. Now that's good advice.

Which leads me to tell you that Leo Tolstoy, bless his soul, also wrote a book called MY CONFESSIONS. Augustine is not the only one to have done something like that - - and Tolstoy in his CONFESSIONS says that he's discovered that when life comes upon people rather heavily and begins to take away things that they cherish, like their health, or their job, or a loved one - - - when life becomes very oppressive, he's discovered that there are at least four options that are open to people:

One is this: Commit suicide. Don't try to go on living any longer.

Call life a bad mess, in which there is no hope whatsoever.

...and there are people who respond and react just that way, they call it quits...they can't find anything left upon which to build.

Then, says Tolstoy, there are some people who when they respond to

life's bitter blow, respond in a very stoical fashion. They say, well if this is it, this is it. And they grin and they

bear it -- not courageously, not triumphantly. But they just accept it.

Then there's the third option which is open to some people. Perhaps it is open to all of us. When life begins to rob us, we refuse to face up to it. We try to pretend that it never happened. And in order to accomplish this, we turn to alcohol, we turn to drugs -- honestly! And the sad thing about that also is that once a fellow sobers up, and once the drug wears off, the situation remains exactly as it was before - - it hasn't changed a bit!

But when life turns robber and evidently tries to defeat us, this is an alternative.

Now none of the three that I've mentioned for you so far can be characterized as Christian alternatives. We have an example in our Lord Jesus Christ, who turned courageously and creatively when life beat its bitter blow, and built upon it - - He strengthened the little that remained.

- And to this day it's being magnified gloriously.

H. G. Wells very perceptively once observed that he didn't much care for the average crucifix that Christians respect and reverence, I suppose -- he didn't much care for this characterization of Jesus Christ hanging limp on a cross. But, he said, if he had His way, he'd give the Christians a crucifix alright -- but he'd free that one hand that's outstretched, perhaps the right one, and while the other one might be nailed to the other arm of the cross, he'd raise the right hand with a clenched fist - - as much as to say: "Even in defeat I defy anyone to destroy truth, to destroy the very love of God. Now that's the Christian alternative. It is possible. And

there are those who have done it. And they cry to us from Heaven above --

"Right on! - - bravely, courageously so!"

What now, you ask so earnestly, what does one do when so much that we cherish seems to be taken away from us? It does happen, you know. No one has any guarantee of the kind of security that will keep us from being vulnerable. We could lose our health.....we could lose our job.....we could lose our home.....we could lose our loved ones. What, then, does one do?

There's only one thing to do: you look for what remains, and you build anew upon it. The worst thing that a beaten man can do is to spend his remaining strength lamenting the blows already received. The best thing he can do is to begin to count his blessings all over again. For no matter what happens, some good always remains.

I sat with you -- sure I did -- as many of you watched, deeply moved, the autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman - - almost incredible how a woman who was born to misery could have one precious thing after another taken away from her, and yet be able to reach the age of a hundred and ten -- indomitable! I shan't fault you a bit, my friend, if your eye became moist long before the closing scene, when she sat there by the oak tree and simply reflected upon misery after misery, and then said, "But I sit here and count my blessings" . . . which is simply to say, with one diminishing return after another, some good thing always remained. . .

. . . I dare you to believe it.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"First Communion" - 9:45 a.m.

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

While it should be an established fact that this sermon has rich meaning for all who are here, let me say quite parenthetically, there's something wrong with your spiritual sensitivity if you should be here today and not be deeply moved. So while this service has deep meaning for all who may be here, it has particular meaning for:

...Jenny...and Jeannie...and Barbara....and Carolyn
...and Jean...and Denise...and Sarah...and Renee
...and Lori....and Karin.

At five different times they have sat with the Senior Pastor, together with their teacher, in anticipation of a very precious moment before the altar of God. And now they have come to this day.

The text for this brief meditation, the words of our Blessed Lord, spoken at the time when He first instituted the Sacrament.

"This do in remembrance of me."

Last evening in final preparation for this service, some forty of us were gathered in Bieber Hall, the first Communicants together with their parents and certain others. At a particular point in our meeting together Saul Kohler, one of the parents of a young lady to receive the Sacrament today for the first time, was asked to share with us something of the rich tradition in which he was reared and trained. He knows first-hand the meaning of the Passover. And I dare say he held all of us in the hollow of his hand when he said that the question-of-questions that's put on the

night of the Passover when it's being celebrated devoutly in Jewish homes is this: "Wherein is this night different from any other night?"

...and from that moment on, then, the head of the household begins to recall for all who are present how the hand of God mightily rested on His Chosen People and again and ever so often delivered them, rescued them, and saved them.

Now to our young friends who are about to receive the Sacrament for the first time, you will do well each time you come to receive the Sacrament to ask the question:

"Wherein is this different from anything else?"

The difference lies in the fact that you are being asked to remember, remember something and to remember Someone. And that Someone is God who came to us in the form of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life that our sins might be forgiven. So each time when you come to receive the Holy Communion you are being asked to remember Him in a very special way. . . . and then to remember particularly what it was that He did. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

It's no secret, of course, and I hope you know why it is that I tell you this, but I look with affection and with gratitude upon the man who happens to be the Assistant Pastor of this congregation. I have more reason than any of you to look with gratitude upon him because once in our relationship together he was the person who saved my life -- he rescued me from drowning. So on occasion when I look at him I remember particularly the one thing that he did for me that needed to have been done that no one else at that particular moment could have done. So, my young friends, when you come to receive the Sacrament, as long as you live remember what Jesus Christ has done for you. And there are some of us who have our lives

constantly renewed and transformed by the things that we remember.

A man's character is determined by the things that he remembers, and your life, from now until the end of your earthly pilgrimage, can be transformed, blessed and sanctified every time you remember Jesus, and particularly when you receive the Sacrament.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TURNABOUT"
(John 3:5)

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

For the moment at least, let's say that the energy crisis is a 'mixed bag' - - that's simply to say it's not all bad. By this time you may have discovered that reduced thermostatic readings could be in many cases a great deal healthier for some of us; and if the gasoline shortage should force us to think twice before we go out to the car and turn on the ignition key to go anywhere, it could result in a sensible economy not only of time but also of gasoline itself.

Now as to that lowered speed limit: I frankly confess that on that first Saturday when I experimented with it, complying voluntarily, I was delightfully surprised to discover that when I arrived at my destination, having driven all the way an average of 50 miles an hour or a little below that, I was much more relaxed and much more composed and far readier for my meeting than I think I would have been had I driven at that higher rate of speed, 70 miles an hour for the greater part. And in addition to all that, driving at a slower pace, one can see the scenery as he had not quite observed it before, to say nothing of being able to read the road signs.

There was a man who in those happier days of just a few short months ago took that trip across country, and when he arrived on the West Coast he came to the conclusion that in all likelihood he had traveled some 5,000 miles, and he likewise concluded that had he kept a record of all the road

signs that he had seen, that the number could have reached perhaps 6,000. Then he waxed philosophical for the moment, and he happened to remember what someone had done as he remembered these road signs, particularly those put up by the state highway departments -- he said they could be categorized in at least four different groups:

- - first, he said, there would be the moralistic ones, the signs that read such as these -- "KEEP RIGHT" -- "GO SLOW" "CAUTION" -- "LOW GEAR" -- "REDUCE SPEED" -- "NO PASSING" -- "PROCEED WITH CARE" -- -

- - then, he said, the second grouping could be the psychological ones -- "HIDDEN ENTRANCE" -- "SINGLE LANE"

- - he had a third grouping, would you believe it, and this he labeled the sensuous ones -- "SOFT SHOULDERS" . . . and up in New Jersey and New York -- it's a fact -- there are signs that read: "SQUEEZE AHEAD"

- - then the last grouping -- the existential ones -- -
"DEAD END" -- "NO EXIT"

As I travel along I am, as you might suspect, quite taken by the signs that have a religious connotation, put up by well-meaning, nobly-intentioned folk, despite their lack of the aesthetic touch. Some are crudely printed . . . I think of one that I invariably pass on our way home -- you have to slow down to cross the bridge, and then there is this hillside that almost comes down upon you, and dominating it is this huge rock on which some ambitious chap has crawled up and scrawled there "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD."

The other one is a searching question in the religious signs: "WHERE
WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?"

...and of course the most popular of all of them:

"YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN"

I muse to myself and wonder what people think when they read these
signs, if they think at all -- "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD" . . .

...it could have a very morbid aspect, you see....as though
yours could be the next fatal accident around the turn, failing to include
the very pleasant thought that when one does meet his God, it could be --
you get that -- it could be -- a very happy and joyous occasion, because
God is a God of love, and when one meets Him as the slogan implies, gleaned
from a Scriptural passage, he could meet Him in the company of those who
have gone to be in His nearer presence, all the loved ones with whom some
day we hope to have cherished reunion.....but I'm not so sure that he re-
acts that way when he reads the sign: "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD"

And then the probing one: "WHERE WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?" . . .

...as though Eternity is something that's yet to happen
in the far future. We make much of the fact that Eternity includes the
here and the now, and happy is the man who allows himself to believe, as
well he might, that already he's caught up within the eternity of things,
and already he can enjoy the blessings which God has for those who are al-
ready enjoying Eternal Life -- this aspect of it.

Now as to "YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN." . . . I'm not so sure that the
average person understands that. It causes some people a great deal of per-
plexity. I'm not so sure that the person to whom those words, as we under-

them, were first spoken understood them. You do remember, don't you, that there was this very fine fellow who came to Jesus Christ under cover of darkness -- Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night -- and don't you dare fault him for coming by night. Whatever may have been the reason that prompted him to go by night, the fact is that he went -- he did have his precious moments with Jesus Christ....and then in their encounter Jesus Christ brings him up quickly and says, "But, Nicodemus, I know what your problem is, brother -- except you be born again of the spirit you cannot enter the Kingdom of God! Nicodemus -- you've got to be born again!"

I don't know that Nicodemus fully understood that. I don't know that you and I fully understand it. But I do say to you with all the strength that my soul can command as I stand at this sacred desk, that we never really appreciate the Christian experience until we've gained some appreciation for the fact of re-birth...conversion....re-generation. It's a necessary ingredient. It is a basic element of the Christian experience. You read for yourself the pages of the New Testament as though you'd never read it before and be absolutely captivated, how every now and then person after person is someone whose life has been turned around, whose life has been re-generated, whose life has been transformed - - - who discovers himself within the circle of believers, and not outside.....who can speak first-hand and say that he knows that he is in Christ, and that being in Christ, he is, as Saint Paul puts it so magnificently according to the J. B. Phillips' translation: "a brand new person altogether."

Now what troubles some people is this, that they feel that they have missed something because they've not had the re-birth in the same way that other people have had the re-birth, that the re-generation has not set in in

the same precise manner that it has set in in somebody else. Now I want to speak to that if you don't mind.

First, disabuse yourself of the notion that re-birth and conversion and re-generation, that these are things that happen only to rascals who come under the grace of God, that they happen only to people who have been the worst of sinners. Do I surprise you when I tell you that when Jesus Christ said to a man, "You must be born again" - - he was saying those words to a very decent chap, to a man, if he were living today and would be a member of Saint Luke Church, we might even look upon him as a kind of exemplary member. He was very moral. He was even a leader in the Jewish religion. It was to this man that Jesus said, "You must be born again."

...so disabuse yourself of the notion that you have to go out and commit all kinds of sin and go to the very depth before you can know what it is, by the grace of God, to be transformed.

The second thing I'd like to say to you is, if you were to press me against the wall and say, "Pastor, can you tell us when you were re-born?" - - the precise time, I can't do it. I can't have the same kind of situation, if one seems to believe this to be the prerequisite, that John Wesley had. Bless his soul, no matter where he went he was able to tell people -- was it May 25 in the year 1735 at quarter-to-nine in the evening in Aldersgate Street Mission, when some chap happened to be talking about what Luther had to say regarding the Epistle to the Romans...and it was then and there, as though he were putting his finger exactly on it, that he said in that classic manner, "I felt myself strangely warmed -- I felt my heart strangely warmed."

Or if you're keeping yourself up to date, as is recommended reading

for this parish, that day by day we read a chapter in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, you know what happened in the life of that man Paul -- where the change was so dramatic at a particular place and time...and from that moment on he became Paul, and no matter where he went he kept thinking about that particular experience on a particular road.

Now some of us can't do that. But we do permit ourselves to believe that we're numbered among the re-born. We're numbered among those who are being re-generated. We're numbered among those whose lives are being turned around. For me, my friend, I am happy to say, it's a continuation, it's been an increasing, a gradual revelation, which has certain moments (listen carefully) that seem to be highlights, when it all seems to be enhanced -- certain periods when the transforming, the renewal, sets in all over again. Did you ever think of it that way?

Now any sermon that's to be preached on turn-about Christians will command your respect as I hope this sermon will command your respect because it's being preached autobiographically. I have no right to preach to you about this if I cannot bear testimony from my own soul -- to wit:

-- my confirmation, while it meant something to me as a youngster of twelve years of age, had a re-generating, transforming and enhancing touch when I placed my hand in blessing and confirmed one of my own -- flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood and I hope spirit of my spirit. Not that my confirmation at twelve years of age meant nothing to me, but it meant ever so much more to me when I saw it through his eyes and through his experience.

God allows us such times of renewal, and enhancement. And I think this must be recognized as a part of the re-birth experience.

And then if you permit me to tell you -- when I had the good fortune to take his first-born and hold him in the crook of my arm and to name him for Jesus Christ -- not only the baptism of that child took on added significance but also the baptism of his father, and my baptism, took on added significance. Why not? Says Martin Luther, bless his soul, that every single day that we live we Christians should recognize the validity of our baptism all over again.

I'm reluctant to tell you this, because I don't care to expose weaknesses in my soul in your presence, and yet the testimony may serve a purpose . . . not that I ever failed to appreciate her, but it was only after I walked away from the place where I had laid her to rest that it occurred to me in a very real way that it was this woman, my mother, who first taught me to pray -- who as no other person on the face of the earth introduced to me the fact of God! Not until I was in my mid-50's did I begin to appreciate all over again what I'd like to think was always there. So what I am saying to you, my friend, as one who believes in Jesus Christ -- look for the moments of rapture -- enlightenment -- transformation, that can come again and again in your onward growth and development, in your spiritual pilgrimage -- in which you become increasingly aware of the fact that you are a child of God....and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever break that bond between God and you.

How did that transformation take place in the likes of Nicodemus? I have two things to suggest to you that you ought not to forget:

One, being a believer in God, he didn't have a completely adequate idea of God -- he thought of God only in the sense of power, a performer of miracles. You and I are born-all-over-again when we discover that God is something more than a God-of-power. He's a

God of redeeming love. Nicodemus had the transformation and the re-birth set in, I dare say, when it was established when he realized that goodness is not goodness just because we do good, but true goodness is goodness because of the spirit that prompts it. And this is always something that happens from within.

The truly good deed is done by the good man, and the good man is created by the good heart that's touched by the grace of God!

Surely in the time of Judgment God will look upon us and judge us -- I warn you -- as His spokesman....He will judge us not only on the basis of what we've done but above all else He will judge us on the basis of why we did what we did....."Except you are born of the spirit ye cannot enter the Kingdom of God - - you must be born again."

I have been going to see our friend Frank Gunther who is a patient in the hospital, at least he was up until yesterday. Day before yesterday when I went to see him, I came just as he was listening to the newscast. When it was finished he turned to me and said rather philosophically - - "It's all bad news, Pastor -- no good news -- all bad news."

...I get quite excited when occasionally the Assistant Pastor reads the Lessons and he announces the Third Lesson. He doesn't always do things according to the book. The book says the Third Lesson is to be announced: "The Holy Gospel for the Day is written in . . . " But if you've noticed, he comes to that point and in his own manner he says: "The Good News - - " ...with almost a lilting quality in his voice . . . and then he reads for us the Gospel.

Well, I am happy to tell you this is what the Christian religion is always about -- to remind us that there is Good News, that it is possible to

be constantly exposed to the grace of God by which the transforming touch sets in. This I most certainly believe. It's the Good News - -

- - for today - - for tomorrow - - and to the end of time.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"OF A FAULT AND A FORGIVENESS"
(Philemon 15)

MAKE US quiet before Thee, O God,
that perchance in this place and
at this time we could hear the
echo of Your voice down the cor-
ridor of Eternity. Amen.

Let me tell you at once that the introductory remarks dealing with today's sermon are a mixture of fact and speculation. But relax, my good friend, you need have no fear, I know exactly who I am and why I am here and the responsibility that rests upon me to proclaim the truth of the Gospel. So I shall not confound you, nor shall I deceive you. And if you need it, I'll separate the fact from the speculation for you as I go along.

Now let's deal with some of the facts . . .

There did live in a town called Colossae a man named Philemon, who was married to a woman named Apphia, and together they had a son named Archippus....

....I can also give you this as a fact, that there came to that city of Colossae on a certain occasion a traveling preacher, his name was Paul.....

Now how Philemon and the traveling preacher first met I can only speak now by way of speculation. It may have been that Philemon has a neighbor, and the neighbor came to him and said, "Philemon, I've just heard that a new preacher has come to town. His reputation has preceded him, he speaks very earnestly, and he tells us things that we've never heard before. He gives a different understanding about the nature and character of God. Philemon, I'm going tonight and I think you ought to come along." - - it may

HAVE HAPPENED THAT WAY. I can't give that to you as factual information.

But it doesn't hurt to give it to you by way of speculation.

...or it may have been that the hight the traveling preacher had come to Colossae, Philemon had strange stirrings within him. You can never quite tell how the Holy Spirit is going to work! - - and restive and restless, Philemon took to the streets, and as he was walking about rather aimlessly, he heard people singing . . . and there is in every man a desire to follow a song until he finds its source - - - which Philemon, I say to you by way of speculation, may have done. And when he got to the place where people were singing, he discovered that a band of Christians were gathered together, and before he knew it he found himself crossing the threshold and becoming part of the group. And after a while it came time for the preacher-come-to-town to speak. I think Philemon was held spellbound -- it does happen that way sometimes -- he was captivated by the interpretation of the sacred truth. God uses people that way. And then when the service was over, Philemon tarried. And he said to the new preacher-come-to-town, "You hit me tonight, preacher, you opened my eyes to some things that I had never known before. Won't you come and be a guest in my household? I'd like you to meet my wife, I'd like you to meet my son."

...now mark you, I cannot give this to you by way of fact, it's only speculation. But it doesn't hurt to speculate this way. If you can come up with something better, very well, my friend.

But at any rate, let's say the preacher went to visit in the home of Philemon.

And there he met his wife and there he met his son. But I don't know whether or not he ever met, the first time he crossed the threshold of Philemon's house, another member of that household. His name was Onesimus, a

servant, a slave -- one of 60 million slaves in the whole Roman Empire. Now by way of speculation, I'd like to think that one of two things could have happened . . .

-- when the slave brought in the heated water in the basin for the guest to wash his feet before he sat down to eat, the eyes of the slave met the eyes of the man-of-God. And something happened. The slave found something in those eyes that he had never found in the eyes of any other man. And I'd like to believe that the slave didn't quite forget . . .

-- or it may be that their eyes never met at all, and the slave had to keep his place, and in that respectful distance that separated him from the guest, Onesimus kept looking at this man-of-God and found him somewhat different.

Now there you have it -- a mixture of fact and speculation.

But let's hurry on with the story. As the record has it, the slave ran away. Now why did he run away? I can only speculate, my friend. Would you be willing to believe that maybe he ran away because he got sick and tired of the new dose of religion that Philemon introduced into his household because it's a matter of record that Philemon took his new Christian experience so seriously that he turned his house into a church, and people gathered there for worship. And the slave got sick and tired of it, sick and tired of hearing these people sing these hymns, sick and tired of all the new work-load that was added to his responsibilities, the extra water that had to be drawn and carried and heated . . . more people for whom food had to be prepared, cleaning up after they had gone. And so because he was fed up with their religion, he ran away . . . maybe . . . who knows!

Or it may be that one day he and Philemon had a quarrel over some trivial

matter. Or, if you please, while you speculate, it could be that some well-meaning civil-rights worker had come to Colossae, and somewhere he had met the slave and he lit the torch of freedom within the soul of Onesimus, and Onesimus became impatient with his lot and permitted himself to believe that he was born to be free, not to be in bondage. And so when he had his chance, he ran away, without any so much as a fare-thee-well and a goodbye to his master. And what is more (I am sorry to have to tell you this) when he ran away he took with him some stolen objects from the household.

All right, now let's separate the fact from the speculation:

-- a man names Philemon, who lived in a town called Colossae, married a woman called Apphia, with a son called Archippus, had a slave named Onesimus . . .

-- Paul-the-preacher came to Colossae . . . Paul befriended them and they feasted him -- they had a bond between each other. -- eventually the slave runs away, and as he takes with him the stolen objects to hand over to a fence somewhere, he has enough money then to get him on his way, all the way to the place where eventually all runaways ended, the Imperial City of Rome, where they could be safe.

Now what do you suppose happened in Rome? -- of all things, he ran into the preacher! -- that new preacher who had come to Colossae, a man who had been a guest in the home of his master.

Now if you were to ask me, was this part of God's plan, I'd say yes! And if you were to ask me was he running away because he was fed up with religion, I'd say maybe, but I know this to be true, that in God's plan what he was running away from was what he was meant to run to! And so he runs smack into the preacher Paul one day. But what I'd much rather tell you is this:

unhappy soul that he was as a slave, in that chance meeting - - - ah, you dare say that in the name of Christ nothing's chance! - - - but in that meeting with the preacher God put before him an agent, an agent of reconciliation to whom eventually he was drawn as by a magnet.

Now let me pause for a moment and tell you, something that I don't think you'll like to hear, and your displeasure at what I'm going to tell you perhaps will be determined by your experience and your own personality and your own temperament. But this is what you probably won't like to hear: down deep in every one of us -- that means in you, and in me, there is always something of the rascal. The church has a classic term for it -- we call it the stain of original sin. But be that as it may for the moment, down deep inside of us there is always something of the rascal and eventually it may have its hour.

It may take us far down the wrong road. And depending upon the circumstances and the person himself, only God knows how much irreparable damage could be done. But suppose when the rascal emerges, what happens? Well I can only tell you on the basis of this letter to Philemon - - - estrangement sets in. The degree of alienation is firmly established. Oh, by the way, you ought to read this letter that Paul wrote to Philemon. It has only 25 verses. Sad to say, many Christians live and die without having read the letter, and read aloud at a moderate pace and much the same as I'm speaking to you now, you can read that letter to Philemon in two minutes and about twelve seconds. It's a magnificent treatise.....

...now let's go back again . . . estrangement had set in between these two people, the master and the runaway slave. Undoubtedly Philemon was hurt, his pride had a terrific blow because he was a Christian, and now in the face of the Christian community he had to admit that a man within his own household was so treated that he could no longer stand to remain. And whatever it was that caused Onesimus to run away, it surely must not have

been a very pleasant thing. So now, then, look upon it as estrangement.

Now this sermon has been meant for you and for me to be very practical. It could be if you wanted to you could probe your own heart and know how at this time or that time we have had strained relationships with people. Relationships have been broken. Now what do you do? Let's look quickly at the options.

One option is this: you can begin to rationalize, and when you do that you will be prone to blame everybody under the sun except yourself.

Secondly, you can consider that you yourself have been wronged, and because you have been wronged, you can say to yourself a correction needs to be made, and it needs to be done by the person who wronged me. Retribution is in order -- pay! -- pay! -- pay! -- and I'll never have done with this thing until it's corrected in that way and full payment is made.

Another option is this: once wrong has been done and relationship has been strained, you can in all good conscience say to yourself, let's set about setting up security measures to make certain that this thing never happens again.

-- now any one of these is good -- please don't misunderstand me -- but in the sight of Jesus Christ they are not good enough, taken by itself or altogether, because not one of them is truly positive. And the Christian way of handling a situation of estrangement is always to accentuate the positive -- "Let's do what we can to correct, and in the correcting of the thing to improve it!" . . . and I am happy to tell you that out of our own experience. ~~waxkaxxax~~

We have a piece of antique furniture that once was broken, and after the broken thing had been mended and restored to us, it's far stronger than it was when we first got it. And this is a happy thing to remember. Alright then, in God's plan -- don't let me lose you -- in God's plan the runaway is

in front of the preacher and the preacher is God's agent as the reconciling one, the restorer, and by the grace of God the runaway -- would you believe it -- becomes a Christian! Don't ever sell the grace of God short! He became such a good Christian that Paul was reluctant to give him up. He was happy to have him. But then Paul writes a letter to Philemon and he says, "He's coming back, and you should take him back."

Now I am fully aware that there are two schools of thought in this whole counseling bit. There's a school of thought in counseling that says you never make up anybody's mind for himself. You just wait and wait and wait until they can see the light for themselves....

....then there is another school of thought that doesn't hesitate -- when they recognize right for what it is and evil for what it is, they call it by its rightful name, and they don't hesitate to say

to the person who's come for counseling: "This is what you ought to do."

Well, in no uncertain manner that's what Paul says to Philemon -- "Take him back! And when you take him back I want to tell you something . . . I honestly believe --" (and this is the 15th verse of that Letter for you)

"For perhaps he therefore departed
for a season, that thou shouldst receive
him forever."

" - - Philemon, look at what you can learn from this whole experience. Let the grace of God do something to you as the grace of God has done something to Onesimus, and the net result will be that you'll have something finer on your hands than you've ever had before."

You know very well, of course you do, that after 33 years in the ministry and after spending 18 years with people like you, more and more of you come to me asking counsel and advice, particularly when relationships have become estranged.

And you know what I look for for the first time when you come to me? - - the kind of material that you bring and the earnest desire on your part to have reconciliation set in. The pieces may be broken, but if the material is good, the adhesive which is the grace of God has something with which to work. So therefore, my friend, take heart, as Thornton Wilder once observed - - "Happy is the association that can grow out of a fault and a forgiveness."

Up in Pennsylvania the State Highway Department knows the annoyance with which it has to deal when people have to encounter a detour. Some clever chap has come up with this phraseology, and I hope he got a promotion because of it - - - "The inconvenience is temporary . . . the improvement is permanent."

My friend, when relationships are estranged for you, by the grace of God take heart - - they can be restored - - they can be improved. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ON BEING QUIETLY CONFIDENT"
(Isaiah 30:15)

O GOD, The world is too much with us. It makes too many noises, and we're pushed around. And we haven't much time to think about You. But right now in this place we would like to think about You, and if Your Holy Spirit will help us, we might be able to give You a better measure of attention. Let it happen. Amen.

Life has been pictured in many ways, of course. For our purpose this morning let me suggest that life is like an old ugly money-lender. Now why in the world would I tell you that it could be said that life is like an old ugly money-lender? Well let me tell you a story, then you might better understand.

I read the story this past week for the first time, and having read it, it struck me as though it could be legendary, the kind of thing that one generation would pass on to another. There was this old ugly money-lender who delighted in contriving situations, maneuvering and manipulating people into a corner, and then taking advantage of them.

Well, one day he loaned a sum of money to a merchant. The merchant suffered financial reverses, and it came time to re-pay the loan and he was unable to do so. The old ugly money-lender pressed him against the wall...and then he came up with a diabolical scheme-of-sorts. He said, "I'll tell you what we'll do - - - you have a very lovely attractive daughter. This is the scheme: standing where we are on this pebble-strewn walk, I'll reach down and put two pebbles into this bag that I have -- it's an empty bag -- and one pebble will be black and one pebble will be white. And if your daughter picks the black pebble, she becomes my wife and your debt will be cancelled. If she takes the

white one, she stays with you, and your ~~debt~~ ^{back if their back block} will still be cancelled."

...well, the merchant agreed. The old ugly money-lender reaches down now to pick up two pebbles -- the rascal -- only the lovely lady sees exactly what he does ...and puts them in the bag.

Now I know exactly what you're thinking - - she's trapped. There's no way out of the situation. And that's the way some of us react to life these days. We say we're being trapped, the pressures come from here and the pressures come from there. If we had an old-fashioned testimonial meeting right now, some of you might make bold to stand up and tell us how you're trapped . .

...trapped in the situation where you happen to work, and you just don't know how to get out of it, and you have been trapped for so long that you say "There's no way out!

...some of you are trapped where you live -- it's not a very happy situation, and for any number of reasons you still can't find a way out, and the situation seems hopeless...

....some of you might confess that you're trapped with yourself. You've taken a good long look at what you happen to be, and you're not pleased with it. And due to certain mitigating circumstances, you don't know how you can extricate yourself from yourself....and so you say you're trapped....

-- some of us react that way to the energy crisis -- we're trapped -- we're powerless to do anything about it....

-- some of us react that way to the international scene....

-- some of us react that way to the national scene, and we spend a great deal of our time, far more than we should, just going

around talking to ourselves and hearing the echo of our own voices -- there's no way out -- we're trapped.

Well, let's go back to that story again, do you mind? There is more to that story than I told you. The lovely lady, she reached down into the bag in which there are two pebbles -- remember now, she had seen what the rascal had done -- so very cleverly, when she reaches into the bag she pulls her hand out quickly and in a rather clumsy fashion deliberately allows it to fall onto the pebble-strewn walk which has all kinds of pebbles in it. She says, "Forgive me, I'm such a clumsy one, but don't worry -- there's still another pebble in there, and by looking at that one you can know which one I drew." Well the rascal knew exactly what he had done, and he dared not admit it.

....now aren't you ashamed for thinking to yourself that there was no way out! But that's the way we are, you see! It's the power, as someone said, of negative thinking -- there's no way out.

Well now, all of this leads me to the text. I'm reaching back into the days of the Old Testament. There was a prophet by the name of Isaiah -- you can read it for yourself as the 15th verse of the 30th chapter of this man's prophecy. It's an interesting bit of history, and God be praised if you have an historian's blood coursing through your veins, because you always have an advantage if you can see things from the historical perspective.

Isaiah discovered that the people in his day were beginning to panic, because they were being boxed in, they were being cornered, they were being contrived against, and as a tiny kingdom they were at the mercy of the Assyrians to the north and the Egyptians to the south, and they had diplomats worth a dime-a-dozen who were going like mad, entering into all kinds of al-

liances, and there were all types of military strategy.

Now don't get me wrong -- I'm very happy when I know that military strategy is in the hands of a very shrewd person, and I'm very happy when our diplomacy is in the hands of someone who is unusually astute. We live in a world where we need this kind of thing. But one daren't stop at that point, even as Isaiah didn't stop at that point, and when he discovered that his people were beginning to panic because they saw some of these alliances were breaking down and some of this military strategy wasn't paying off. And they began to think that they were being boxed in and there was no way out.

And there was this man of God who stood up with all of his strength and said, "I know what your problem is, brother -- you are succumbing to the power of negative thinking because you're ruling out the fact of God! With God there is always a way out or a way through, for the simple fact that God is the Lord of history." And as I told some of you before, I'm impressed as I read the Bible all over again from cover to cover as though I had never read it before, to discover how the God of history is at work! And He will not be over-ruled, and He will not be shoved around - - - maybe for a season, but eventually the purposes of God will be served, and we need to remember this.

In capsule fashion I say to you, when you're prone to think that you're trapped, the Bible reminds us that with God there is always either a way through or a way out - - - take heart.

Now Isaiah says that in order to remember this, and in order not to panic:

"Return unto the Lord, for in quietness and in
confidence shall be your strength."

When we panic we are always crippled, we're always weakened when we become panicky.

Sounds like double talk, really. But that's what the sign said: 'Busy thy soul with quietness.' And it was found, of all places, in a physician's waiting room. It constitutes a rather happy blend of religion and medicine, wouldn't you say, since the apostle Paul used to counsel people to 'study to be quiet.' And long, long before the Galilean-Gospel proclaimer was making His rounds there was a lyric writer who said something about "Be still and know God." What our age needs, I think, more than anything else, is to be quiet long enough to deal with the God-perspective, to hear God. Now God doesn't shout -- God whispers. And you need to be made quiet in order to hear a whisper.

Now I'll grant you it takes a bit of doing to learn how to be quiet. I don't know that we've mastered it. I'm reasonably certain that if right now I walked down from this pulpit and sat alongside of Mark, and then for twenty minutes this service was given over to the ministry of silence, I would have an uneasy congregation on my hands.....you'd begin to fidget...some of you might even get up and walk out....some of you might want to check with an usher to see if the Pastor was ill.....some of you might wonder whether the organ failed, because you think we ought to sing a hymn at that point. Some of you who were here last Sunday heard me announce that because we have the good fortune in Saint Luke to have Vespers the year around, we can have a variety of services during the Vesper Period, so last Sunday we announced that when we came to Vespers we would spend the half-hour in the ministry of silence, in the manner of the Society of Friends. The Quakers have mastered the art of silence, and I would be less than honest if I didn't tell you that when 5:00 o'clock came I was very, very apprehensive because I just didn't know how it would come off because people need to learn how to handle being quiet. Well

relax, I'm happy to tell you it came off perfectly beautifully and I hope some time we can do it again.

Some years back I was ~~the~~ of necessity spending three days incommunicado in a hospital while a series of tests was being taken. I was forced into idleness. I planned no meetings, scheduled no meetings, went to no meetings, received very, very few if any visitors. And while I waited for the time between the tests I read some books. And one of the books that I read was the autobiography of Mahatma Ghandi -- a man who in my judgment has done more than any other single person in our generation to touch the fabric of humanity in the different parts of the world. When he died, what did he leave behind him? -- a pair of spectacles, a loin-cloth, some books, and the legacy of his spirit. How was it possible for this man to transform the world? -- by his ideology, by his adherence to certain basic principles? Well I discovered it in his autobiography - - - he took one day out of seven which was set aside as a quiet day, time that was given to contemplation and meditation. That was the secret of his strength.

And I have something to say to you, that if you were to ask me, what is the strength of Saint Luke Church? -- I'd be happy if I could tell you it's when you come together like this, to be nurtured and to be edified and to strengthen one another by your fellowship. But I'm also happy to tell you that the strength of Saint Luke Church lies in the fact that every single day there are certain people in this parish who are setting aside a portion of each day, no matter how brief, just to be quiet, to become in tune with God, and to see things from the divine perspective.

That's really what it means to be made quiet! "Return unto the Lord" said the prophet -- 'for in being quiet you shall become strong, and you shall become confident.' This I most certainly believe. And I dare you, if you don't believe it now, to find it out for yourself.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED PETER"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Come now, let me ask you what could be a rather embarrassing question, embarrassing if you attempted to answer it, but I'll spare the rest of us the answer. This is the question: Did it ever occur to you how many people there are whose personalities you would like to change, if it were within your power to do so?

...and I suppose I could add very quickly that any number of people would be perfectly willing to return the compliment, and change your personalities if they could . . . Which leads me to ask you to face rather boldly now the question: Are you numbered among those who honestly believe that human nature can be changed?

I get it from both sides of the fence. There are people who come to me and say, "Pastor, you can't change human nature! A person happens to be what he is, and no matter what happens, to the end of time he'll go on being that kind of a person!"

- - on the other hand, there are those of you who come with glowing reports of the transformation that has taken place in people's lives, seemingly today they are as different as night is from day.

Now I should say that if you were to ask me, where do I stand? - - well I suppose I ought to say quite quickly I hope you wouldn't have to ask me. I hope you know that I believe in the power of God, and for those who would be His agents, that it is possible for people to change.

Now if you were to press me very hard and say, "But can basic human nature be changed?" - - - I'd have to add rather quickly that there is a school of thought that sometimes commands my respect which maintains that what's basic in human nature doesn't change, but what is possible is that you can re-direct it. You can take a certain person whose life is characterized by a particular kind of energy, and by proper motivation you may get that person, instead of working against something, get him to work for it. There are those who believe this.

Now I suppose according to your experience you may end up and say, Yes, human nature can be changed . . .

. . . or you may say, No, I don't believe it.

Well long before I became a pastor, long before I permitted myself to be steeped in Scripture, I knew something about education. And when I was a student of Latin I began to understand that educate comes from the Latin word e duco, which means to lead out from - - to build upon what is down deep inside. And education can be understood this way: that it's directing a person's life.

Now realizing full well that I happen to be the person that I am -- let me say it to you unashamedly, a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and one who on occasion could stand up and say, "Look at me -- I'm Exhibit A of what can happen by the grace of God!" - - - I read the New Testament, and I'm greatly impressed by the way Jesus Christ brought a transforming touch to the lives of certain people.

I dare you to read the New Testament as though you had never read it before and to discover for yourself all over again how again and ever so often people's lives were changed just because they were encountered by

Jesus Christ, or by someone who reflected His mind and His spirit. (I'm speaking, of course, if their lives were changed for the better).

A good example is that man Zaccheus, one of my favorite Bible characters. I stood one day underneath a sycamore tree at the entrance to Jericho, and I tried to re-live that experience, when Jesus came to Jericho, and surely He had heard as He had His antenna up, that in Jericho there was a man despised by his fellow Jews . . . he was a scoundrel, he was a rascal, he was fraudulent - - - he took advantage of his own people! Then there was that time -- put it that way, there was that time -- when he was encountered by Jesus Christ, and the Scriptures for it, he was given a transforming touch, his life was re-directed, his life was converted! -- turned around completely! From having been a rascal, a grabber, he became a generous giver. It actually happened.

Now with all of that by way of background, I want you to know that during these Sunday mornings in Lent I want to talk to you each succeeding Sunday on men whose lives were made, men whose lives were changed by the touch of the Master. Today it's that man Peter.

Now what do you know about Peter? I presume that I could say this in your behalf, that of all the disciples, he's the one perhaps whose name comes first to your mind. Even if you can't name all the twelve, I'd be willing to wager that if you could only name three, if you could only name two, Peter would always be included.

And I think that's true for several reasons:

One, I think he gets more coverage in the New Testament than any other person outside of Jesus Christ. Now if you want to test me, you read the New Testament for yourself and see if the evidence doesn't come out that way - - gets more coverage, looms more frequently on the horizon, seems to be the center of attention. Well that's one reason, I think, you know Peter

as well as you do.

And then the second reason is a very understandable one: he's most like us, and we are most like him. For want of a better expression, I'd like to say, maybe he's the most human of all the disciples. He'd wax hot, he'd wax cold.....

- - he was courageous.....and he was cowardly

- - he was making big promises....and then other times

he'd fall flat on his face

- - he really wanted to serve his Master....and again and

ever so often he confronted his Master with disappointment.

Now because he happened to have been this kind of a person, I'm willing to say that he has a tug on your heart, and in your more sober moments you may say to yourself, "Well if Jesus Christ could re-make a man like Peter, then maybe there is hope for me."

Now at this point I want to tell you what I've told you before, and maybe as long as I'm your Pastor there will be continued repetition of this, and you can well afford to hear it repeated. It may hold you in good stead far more often than you may care to admit. It's a simple observation:

Every saint has his past;

And every sinner has his future.

....it can be reduced to something as simple as that.

Now let's get back to this man Peter. How was it possible for him to be transformed, his life, his energies, to be re-directed? Well, I'm happy to tell you I think it happened because someone believed that it could happen, and that someone was no less than the Son of God himself. The classic expression of Scripture is the text for today's meditation, the 42nd verse of the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Thou art Simon the son of Jonah - - thou
shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpre-
tation, a stone."

Now if you don't mind, I want to be a little bit reckless. I'm going to give you a perfectly free translation of that test. It might go something like this: It happened one day that Jesus Christ, the wandering preacher, met a man named Peter. And when He saw Peter He looked at him very earnestly, and He gave him the nod, and He beckoned to him.....which was as much as to say, "Peter, I want to talk to you all by yourself." And when He got him away from the crowd and there were just the two of them, the wandering preacher looked the fisherman in the eye and said, "Peter, I have been sizing you up for some time, and I have something that I want to tell you. I know what people say about you -- they keep reminding you what your name means -- you're the son of Jonah. That means the son of a dove. Now I know, Peter, that a dove is a very fragile thing, and maybe you're very fragile. You rise quickly and you fall just as quickly. Peter, I have news for you - - the day is going to come when people will look at you and they'll say you're as solid as a rock! I'm making this prediction, Peter, because I believe in you. I want to tell you something else: if you just stick with me, if you'll just listen to me, if you'll just follow closely, if you're willing to be my man, it will happen! . "

...well that's my free and rather reckless translation of

"Thou art Simon the son of Jonah -- thou shalt

be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone."

Now you're not forgetting what we said just a moment ago -- the transformation of Peter was possible because somebody believed that this was possible. Somebody appealed to his better nature, somebody was willing to draw out the positive forces in his life, and to keep appealing to them. I don't mind

telling you rather parenthetically, there are some people I shy away from because after I have been with them for a while I discover that they draw out the negative qualities in my life. It doesn't do me too much good to spend too much time with them. Contrary-wise, of course, and beautifully so, there are those with whom I do associate who appeal to my better nature, and I am better because of it. Well, it happened with Peter because Jesus Christ honestly believed down deep inside of him there was this potential.

You know very well the high regard that I have for the Quakers. I suppose they first captivated me because when I first studied them I discovered that they perhaps as much as any group of believers in God go on the assumption that there is that which is of God in every man . . . there is that which is of God in every man! - - - and they go looking for it! - - and they build upon it.

Our friend Bruce, who is here this morning, who lived for some time in the Muslim world, might be acquainted with the fact that the old Arab philosopher used to say that the devout Muslim would never so much as ignore an insignificant scrap of paper, because the devout Muslim would say that paper is important because small as it may be, insignificant as it may be, the name of Allah, the name of God can still be written upon it. And there are those who honestly believe that no matter how defaced the image, something of God can still be found in every man - - - look for it! and build upon it!

The second thing I must tell you is this: that Jesus Christ, having believed that the good was there, was very patient. The good didn't always come to the surface. You see, a fact that you and I dare not ignore is this, that we are stained by original sin. I honestly believe this. And if you want a free translation of original sin, it's the inclination that's always down deep inside us to turn toward evil - - - you never completely get rid

of that desire. Washed as you may be (to use the old ecclesiastical jargon)washed as you may be by the blood of the Lamb, this side of the Great Gate you're never completely free of original sin. Properly understood, according to good Lutheran theology, we're sinners to the day we die, but the difference is we're sinners who are being saved! And I give this to you as I think of the unfolding life of that man Peter - - - again and ever so often, even to the very end after he had been in the company of Jesus Christ for three years, it's Peter who denied Him.....it's the Peter who said he never would, but he did! And it took a great deal of patience on the part of Jesus Christ to go on dealing with him. And that's the lesson that you and I have to master in our relationships with people. By the grace of God we can't afford to run out of patience.

Now that doesn't mean that you can't be firm. Anyone who deals with people must have two crowning characteristics, I think: patience which is born of love.....and firmness. Jesus Christ never lowered His standards for Peter, but He was patient with him every time he fell short. Read for yourself how time and again he disappointed Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ never gave up on Peter. He was always willing to wait and take another look at him.

I wish I would have had my pad and pencil in hand when I watched "All In The Family" last night.....there was that quick line that came from Edith's lips -- maybe you missed it, maybe you remember it -- when she said something about, there does come a time in the lives of many people who are married when it seems as though they might be falling out of love with each other. And then, bless her soul, she came in with that little bit of a gem, "But if only they'd wait long enough to take another look."So Jesus Christ was patient enough to give ~~Rare~~ Peter another look.

Somebody once said to Michaelangelo, "What are you doing?" What an awful

QUESTION TO ASK A GENIUS!.....as he stood there before that stone with chisel-and-hammer in hand. Michaelangelo answered superbly, "I'm trying to release the angel that's imprisoned in this block of stone."

I shall no longer be of any value to you, my friend, I shall no longer be worthy of the name 'Pastor' when I no longer believe this. Now happy are you if you have evidence to prove that human nature can be changed for the better -- blessed indeed are you.

...but if you want to come and build a case and say, "but it's very discouraging." I'd have to say to you, by the grace of God, 'But don't give up hope,' for I shudder to think what the alternative would mean.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED ANDREW"

John 1:42

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There are some of us who don't get excited at all about "streaking." And I suppose there are several reasons why we don't get excited about "streaking." One is, chances are about three-and-a-half-billion-to-one that it will catch on and become a way of life. Another is, there is the historical perspective, you see, and one could build a case and say there's nothing at all new about "streaking." It is as old as the human race, because you don't forget Adam, who went streaking here and there throughout the garden.

But I suppose as far as recorded history is concerned, the original streaker may have been Archimedes, who one day when he had made a great scientific discovery, ran out into the streets of the ancient Greek town of Syracuse, stark naked, shouting "Eureka! Eureka! I've found it! I've found it!" Now don't let the nude man keep you from appreciating the naked truth, for here was someone who had found something, something wonderful had happened to him, and he just couldn't keep quiet!

It isn't exactly that he was bereft of his senses that he ran out into the streets naked. I'd like to think that it was simply that he was completely overcome by the wonderful truth that he had discovered, that he gave no thought at all as to whether he was clad or unclad. The wonderful thing had laid hold upon him and he just couldn't keep it to himself. He had to tell somebody.

I don't know what to make of this, honestly I don't -- occasionally I ask people, "Has anything wonderful happened to you lately?" - - or, "Tell me the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to you?" - - and like as not I draw a blank. I do this frequently with the boys and girls in the Catechetical Class, or maybe as I sit with them at the table at Supertuesday when we have supper together - - - "Did anything wonderful happen to you today?" - - I really don't know what to make of it, because like as not I don't get much of an answer. Could it be that so many wonderful things are happening to us that we're not about to put them in the category above other categories and pick out one thing in particular and say, "This, now, is the most wonderful thing."

...Or maybe we have to reach a certain age in life before we begin to appreciate that there are wonderful things that are coming my way....

...I remember Carl Hall, the Boy Scout executive in my home town, who had been told that he had incurable cancer. But on a blustery day when he was walking down Pine Street, somebody said to him about how miserable the weather was, and he simply replied above the storm so that the person could hear, "Well, when your days are numbered, any day is a wonderful day, no matter what it's like." So maybe one has to reach a certain condition or circumstance in life before he discovers that even the gift of a brand new day is in itself a wonderful thing.

And I don't know for some people how long they have to be married until they may discover that from a human point of view the most wonderful thing that ever happened to them is that they did marry the person that they did. Has anything wonderful happened to you lately? Well I'll tell you one thing, when it does happen, you won't keep quiet about it.

It's the nature of these wonderful things that happen to us that compel us to make it known to other people.

In the small college that I attended back in depression years, of necessity the Registrar and the Secretary to the Dean of the Arts and Sciences Department shared the same small room as an office. The Registrar was considerably older than the secretary to the Dean, but one day the younger was startled when she was handed a 3x5 index card which simply read, as it was typed by the Registrar, the older of the two --

Last night the Latin professor
proposed to me -- I've got to
tell somebody!

...well that was her way of passing it on -- "Eureka! Eureka! Eureka!"

...not rushing out on the college campus, but at least she couldn't allow another second to pass. Maybe she just didn't know how to say it, but say it she must! And say it she did! Again I say to you, it's the nature of the situation that when the wonderful thing does happen, the person to whom it happens just can't keep quiet.

Now all of this leads me to announce the text for today's sermon. Today's sermon deals with another character among the men made by the Master. If it's a subtitle you want, it's a series of sermons being preached on "The Master And His Men." Today it's "A Man Named Andrew" -- and this is the text, from the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, the 42nd verse:

"One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him . . ."

(I suppose he could say at this point "Eureka!")

" . . . 'We have found him' (meaning the Messiah) and he brought him to Jesus . . . "

Now you're not forgetting last Sunday morning's sermon, are you? Last Sunday we talked about a man named Peter, the best-known of all the disciples, I dare say. Well now today I want to talk to you about one of the less-known disciples, Andrew. What do you know about him?

Chances are you don't know very much. And maybe the reading of the text simply refreshed your memory and you do recall, oh yes, Andrew, he was Simon Peter's brother. And that's about all that some people know about him -- completely overshadowed by his brother.

Now before anything else is said in this sermon, let me bring to your attention that this happens quite frequently, that there are people who are overshadowed by their relatives.....

-- the father may be overshadowed by his

son, or vice versa

-- a business associate may be overshadowed

by his superior

-- a wife may be overshadowed by her husband,

or vice versa.....

This happens quite frequently -- the overshadowed one may eventually discover that he has a personality complex. There are people who pay perfectly good money to to to a psychiatrist and lie on his couch and lament the fact that they are overshadowed. Life has done something to them because no matter where they go they are always identified by their relationship with someone who is more prominent than they, and this gives them eventually an inferiority complex, because they'd like very much to be able to stand on their own. They become very impressed with the fact that they're always being referred to by virtue of their relationship to this more prominent person. I dare say no matter where Andrew went, he was always referred to as "Simon Peter's brother."

But I am happy to report to you, it didn't give him an inferiority complex. He found his own niche. Sure, ever so often Jesus Christ would look around for the twelve disciples and then He'd nod to Peter, He'd give a favorable glance to James, likewise a favorable glance to John...but not to Andrew. Andrew never made it big, as far as they were concerned. He was never part of the Big Team, the Big Trio. As long as men will read Scripture and think of the twelve disciples, they'll always talk about Peter...James...and John. Andrew was never counted in, even as John was counted in at the foot of the cross, when the recorder makes note of the fact that there was one disciple who was there, and even referred to him as the 'beloved disciple.' Andrew never got that kind of press....he never got that kind of recognition. Poor Andrew, if you please, again and ever so often simply referred to as "Simon Peter's brother." What a distinction!

Andrew was content in life to be the introducer. He's the man who introduced the one who made the big time -- and that's no small thing in itself! And from that time on I dare say he was content to be recognized as the introducer, because that was his lot in life.

If you want to read about him in the Gospel record, you'll discover that altogether on three different occasions he was the introducer . . .

...having been impressed by Jesus Christ himself, he couldn't keep Jesus Christ to himself, so he ran home and found his brother and said, "Come on, Simon Peter, you've got to meet him for yourself -- you've simply got to see!"

Now I can't tell you whether Simon Peter was reluctant or not, but I do know that the Scriptures put it this way: "He brought him . . ." -- he accompanied him -- he walked by his side -- he made sure that he got there.

...he was also the introducer of the little boy who on that

very remarkable occasion when our Blessed Lord had an emergency situation on His hands, -- five thousand people -- moved by compassion, they ought to be fed. You haven't forgotten, have you, what triggered the performance of that miracle? It was Andrew, whose eye happened to fall on the little boy with the lunch, and he took the little boy and he brought him to Jesus, and he introduced the youngster. And out of that little there came a lot! And that's no small thing, either....

...then you can also read for yourself in Scripture how one time a group of Greeks had heard about Jesus Christ, His reputation had preceded Him. They wanted to make His acquaintance -- in fact Scripture puts it this way: "We would see Jesus." And what did Andrew do? Andrew introduced them.....and that's no small thing, to introduce somebody to Jesus Christ!

Now there are several observations I'd like to make on the basis of all this, if you don't mind. One is this: you should have discovered this already -- that Andrew is the patron saint of all those who become chairman-of-a-committee-of-one. He didn't wait for anybody else to give him a directive....he didn't wait to see if anybody else was going to go into action... ..he didn't wait for a resolution to be drafted....he didn't wait for a committee to be organized. He only knew one thing -- something wonderful had happened to him, and he got into motion immediately.

Now I'm not speaking disparagingly of resolutions, and I'm not downgrading the necessity for committees, but I am singing the praise of people who act -- at once. When they see a need that has to be met. I said this at

8:30, and I think I can say it to you now....and if time permits I think I'll say it at 11:15 - - if I were free to leave this sacred desk at this moment and walk down here, the aisle of this church, I could spend a good hour standing alongside of this person and standing alongside of that person, and without embarrassment identifying this person or that person who has released untold good in Saint Luke Church and in this community by being a kind of Andrew, who's gone about doing something good because he or she happened to see the need, and didn't wait for a committee to get organized, to draw up a set of rules and regulations by which to operate.

The longer I am associated with this parish the more I am absolutely overwhelmed by the amount of good that's being unleashed in and through this parish by individuals who constitute a kind of committee-of-one.

Now the second thing that needs to be said, and perhaps more important than anything else, - - the object of Andrew's concern was always to bring a person into relationship with Jesus Christ. He brought his brother -- to Christ. He brought the little boy -- to Christ. He brought the Greeks -- to Christ. I don't think Andrew tried to convince them on his own. He was perfectly content to let Jesus Christ speak for Himself. But he did feel in duty bound to bring about the exposure to Jesus Christ.

Now I have to ask you, as naturally I would, why do you suppose so many of us fall so short in doing something so simple as all that? I think you and I might be shocked if we were to realize the number of people who live and die without anyone ever making the attempt to introduce them to Jesus Christ. And I dare say we might be equally shocked at the number of church people who will live and die without ever really introducing somebody else to Jesus Christ. And without any hesitation I dare say to you I've lived long enough to know -- how it may be with you I don't know -- but for myself,

the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me is the realization that Jesus Christ cares, and saves, and has an abiding concern for my soul. And all of that has been made possible because there have been those who have made it their business in life to introduce me to Christ. ...and again and ever so often to re-introduce me to Christ.

When something wonderful happens to you, you can't keep quiet -- you may shout it -- you may write it on 3x5 index cards -- you may express it by a spring in your step, a whistle from your lips, a change in your attitude - - a transformation of your personality.....when something wonderful happens, it's bound to show.

Maybe that's where this sermon ought to zero in by way of conclusion - - - maybe all too many of us have yet to discover what a wonderful thing it really is to have been found by Jesus Christ. And I dare you to do more than a casual bit of thinking about something as profound as all that!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED JOHN"

WE REALLY don't have to tell you,
O God, what You already know:
seemingly we make so little time
for this sort of thing, to set aside
a period when we'll give You some
measure of undivided attention. We'd
like to think it could happen now, and
so we look to Your Holy Spirit to help
us in that direction. Amen.

Let me remind you at once of the kind of thing we're seeking to do these Sunday mornings during Lent, to take a close look at some of the twelve disciples - - like a camera with its lens that zooms in on one particular person, so that his face can be seen more closely against the background of all the others. We began two weeks ago with the discussion of that man Simon Peter, perhaps the best-known of all the disciple band. And then the last Lord's Day we talked about the man who happened to have introduced him to the Master, a man who is one of the lesser lights among the twelve, a man named Andrew. And now this morning we come to a man named John, of whom it's been said, "He is the disciple Jesus loved."

Let me read the text for you, it's the 26th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel that bears his name:

"Jesus saw his mother and the disciple
whom he loved standing by his side."

As long as man has memory certain associations will invariably be made. Mention a name, and in all likelihood some specific relationship will come to mind.

...what student of history can think of Napoleon
without thinking of Waterloo?

...what student of history can think of Harry Truman

without thinking of the decision to drop the terrible bomb?

Or perhaps when you think of certain people by name, another appellation comes quickly to mind - - the name does stick....

...as long as there are students of history it will be:

--Abraham Lincoln....."Honest Abe"

--Alfred E. Smith....."The Happy Warrior"

-- Calvin Coolidge....."Silent Cal"

-- John....."Beloved Disciple"

...the name sticks.

And if I read you aright, my friend, you'd be very happy if I could re-write the Bible, because there's something about that appellation that irritates you and rubs you the wrong way. You're not about to settle for the fact that there could be one out of twelve of whom it could be said that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. For the implication, you see, is so terribly apparent, as though John had a place of preferment that the others cannot have. You and I cannot picture Jesus Christ with so great favoritism.

It should be a very easy thing for me to say to myself, well we only have five Sundays to do this thing during Lent this year, and when I choose the five out of the twelve disciples to whom I will refer Sunday after Sunday, I'll just skip John, and nobody will know the difference....saying to myself, that's a difficult text -- how can I justify to a congregation that comes together on a Sunday morning that John was the disciple whom Jesus loved.....it would have been a very easy thing for me to have passed him by.

But the text happens to read exactly as it does. And I'm not alone in responding to it as I've just indicated to you just now -- others have res-

ponded in the same way, and this is what they've done....

- - some students of the Bible have said, well don't get too uptight about that because John didn't write the Gospel that bears his name. He simply gathered the material together and after he was gone somebody else came on the scene and put the material as a matter of record, and knowing John as they did, they were the ones who wrote into the record that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved.. ...settle for that -- don't get disturbed -- somebody else referred to John in this way, not John himself.
- - then there are those who say, difficult as the text is, look at it this way: John simply refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" - - but he doesn't say that Jesus loved him more than He loved the others! He was just tremendously overcome with the fact that he was the object of the love of Christ - - that of all the people on the face of the earth, one day Jesus Christ pointed His finger at him and said, "You're my man"...and from that time on he walked and he lived in the sunshine of the love of the Carpenter's Son. And he could never get over it -- "Jesus loves me! - - Jesus loves me! - - Jesus loves me! "...and so he writes it into the Gospel that bears his name: "I, a disciple whom Jesus loved - - "

...Andrew, if he wrote a book, could have done the same thing presumably.....Simon Peter could have done the same thing - - "I, of all the people on the face of the earth, happen to have been the person included among those whom

Jesus loved -- I was loved by Jesus Christ!"

Well, I'm not about to settle for either one of these notions, or both of them. And I can't shy away from the responsibility that rests upon me as a proclaimer of God's truth, to walk away from the sacred desk at this point and say, "That's it! -- do with it what you will." For as I read this Gospel that bears the name of John I find repeated reference to the fact that he seems to have been in the place of preferment. Several times the same reference is made: "the disciple whom Jesus loved"....and it's in this record, mark you, that in the night in which our Lord was betrayed, in the dark night of the soul of Jesus Christ - - who among the twelve does He want to be nearest Him? - - - a man named John. And you and I are human enough to know that when we walk into the deep dark night of the soul, only those whom we happen to love most, from a human perspective, are those that we'd like to have nearest us.

Now if you can do anything else with that thought, you go ahead, but I can't ignore this implication. The record says, "He leaned upon the breast of Jesus" - - - this man named John --- and if that isn't a position of preferment I don't know what is!

And then it's also a matter of record that in His dying moments He looks down from the cross and sees there -- not Andrew -- not Simon -- surely not Judas! -- not Nathanael -- not James.....but a man named John. And the Bible says, as He looked down He said to Mary, His mother, to this man named John -- "Woman, behold your son - - - son, behold your mother" - - - as much as to say to John (if you want a free and reckless translation or interpretation of this text), Jesus is saying to John in this moment: "John, from now on you take my place!" Now you just don't speak words like that to anyone. Such words are reserved only to those who, for want of a better expression,

happen to have a position of preferment. So there you have it! The name sticks -- John, the-Disciple-Whom-Jesus-Loved.

But hear me and hear me well, my friend. I'm not about to say that Jesus Christ loved him more than He loved the others. He loved all of them equally. But this is simply the way of having the record tell us that John responded to that love in a way that the others did not. And that is a truth of life that you and I do well to recognize, that there are some people who have a sensitivity that others do not have.

To what length do I have to go to prove this point for you? We have in this congregation a woman who is one of eleven children, who grew up in the state of Texas, and in conversation with her I have learned that they were all different, as any set of parents probably would attest to that fact. And I suppose if her mother were to speak to us she could recall for us how on different occasions there might have been one or two of those children who responded to her as the other children might not have responded...and not that she loved them more than she loved the others. If you only have two children in your household - - it could be that you ~~u~~ understand what's meant when people say that youngsters can be as different as day is different from night even when you only have two!

How much more do I have to go -- to what length must I go to impress this truth upon you? There was the Dean of Education in a leading university who was training the teachers of the future, and as he had them together one day he said, "Now when you go out to teach, when the day's work is over, happy is that teacher among you who will look back over the day's work and recall the face of at least one responsive pupil!" Now the material was prepared for all of the youngsters in front of the teacher that day. Chances are there's always this pupil or that pupil who responds as the others do not

respond. And it's in this category that I put John, the beloved disciple.

My understanding of this text is not that Jesus loved him more than the others but that John had a way of responding to the love of Christ in a way that the others did not respond. Now if you were to press me and say, why was this? I don't know. I only know that it's a fact of life, that there are people who may fall into that kind of a characterization.

Now let's take a look at John again. For one thing, I am willing to admit that perhaps of all the disciples he fell into the category of those who were younger than the rest. I don't know the ages of the disciples, but I think I am correct in telling you that he was among the younger, and being younger he had a measure of enthusiasm that perhaps some of the others didn't have. He most certainly had an early dedication -- he wasn't an old man who made a decision for Christ.....he was a younger man. And there's something brilliant about that.

And then I also think that when he came to Jesus Christ, he was the kind of person who always came with a readiness to believe. It's a thrilling thing for those of us who have to chair meetings to discover around the conference table those who come in with a readiness to respond, as positively as possible. It saves a lot of time, you see. When the orientation is already there, when the attitude has been set.....a readiness to respond.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not short-changing for a single moment the man whose nature and characteristics are such that he has to question everything. Oh, I'm willing to believe as the man once said, that there will be more faith in honest doubt than half the creeds profess -- this I can understand too. But I also know that Jesus Christ only had three years -- three short years -- to work with these men, to mold them, to make them ready to carry on after He was gone. And every hour was precious. And to think that

every time, if I may put it for you in this way, He sat down with John, there was this readiness to move on to the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing. And always somehow to sense the direction in which the Master was moving.

...but with Peter? -- how often our Blessed Lord had to take time to cut him down to size! -- to clip his wings! ...only God knows how much time Jesus Christ had to spend with Thomas, with all of his doubts -- constantly trying to shore him up and build him up all over again. Not that our Blessed Lord was unwilling to do it, but it took time!

...but with John -- how refreshing! -- to know that the sensitivity was there, and the responsiveness.

I think this was why he has the label sticking to him, for want of any better way of putting it -- the-disciple-whom-Jesus-loved.....I much prefer to say, the-disciple-who-most-responded-to-the-love-of-the-Master.

Now, why in the world do I preach this sermon to you? For a very practical reason, my friend. Every single one of us is caught up in a relationship with other people, and it could well be that by this time you may have been passed by on a half-dozen different occasions, when somebody else got the nod, somebody else got the approving glance, and you didn't. It gives cause for envy, it gives cause for hostility. Occasionally when I counsel with people it's my difficult assignment to say to them, well, I know what your problem is, and at the risk of alienating you I'll tell you what it is -- your pride has been hurt. To the everlasting credit of Andrew, Simon Peter and all the other disciples, they wouldn't come to Jesus Christ and say, "We've had it -- we're sick and tired of the fact that ever so frequently you look to John as you don't look to the rest of us. We've had it, Master! --

- - we'd like to get out of it! We can't take it any longer. Wherever you seem to go, John's by your side! You seem to enjoy his company, you seem to seek his counsel - - ".....we have no record that any of the twelve came, not even Judas, and said, "Jesus, we've had it!"

Now let me say to you as I say to myself, any number of us, I suppose, have been passed by when others got the approving nod. Well if you're just as qualified as they, don't nurse your wounds. It's just happened that that's the way the cookie crumbles. And as over against that, maybe they did have a certain compatability that you and I do not have. And don't fault the person who made the selection. Just know that you and I have a day's work to do where we happen to be, and no day's work honestly done ever goes unrewarded. This I most certainly believe.

And the second practical reason why I share this sermon with you is this: that if you should be the fortunate one, so fortunate that you have these beatific qualities, that from the very beginning you have this sensitivity that others may not have - - for God's sake, cherish it! Don't ever abuse it, don't ever exploit it - - don't ever allow yourself to have an aura of self-righteousness. Look upon it as a gift and hand it over to the gracious hand of God, to use it to His glory. And by the same token, so guard it that no one else can exploit it.

I think I would have liked John. I wouldn't want to live in a world where there wouldn't be that kind of a person who could respond as I may not be able to respond. For what joy it must bring then to the Master, and He, too, is entitled to having His heart gladdened.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED MATTHEW"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There is always the possibility that tomorrow could be extraordinary -- somewhat different from any other day that we've ever lived. Experience may prove this for you already. Look back over the days of your years, and is it not true that there are certain days that are distinctive -- certain days somewhat different from any other day that might have preceded it? Whatever your age may be, my friend, this is most certainly true.

As an example, whether you're aware of it or not - -

- that day was different for your father, for your mother,
when you spoke your first word, when you took your
first step.....
- that day was different than any other day when you enrolled
in kindergarten, when you went off to be a first-grader....
- that day was different from any other day when perhaps you
formally completed your college education, graduate school
experience.....
- that day was different when you got your first job.....
- that day was different when your superior called you in and
told you that that dreamed-for promotion would be a reality
within a matter of two weeks - - that day was different.....
- that day was different when there was no question about it --
you met her, and your life has never again been the same.....

-- that day was different....when the angel of death hovered
over your home and broke your family circle for the
first time and took a loved one into God's nearer
presence.....

Whatever the nature, the character, there's always the possibility that tomorrow could be a different day. Brand it, if you will, a day of destiny.

I want to talk to you this morning about a man named Matthew, who looked back and remembered a particular day in his life that was vastly different from any other day. You'll get the rationale and the justification for this thought when I read the text for you. It's from a book that bears his name, it's the 9th chapter, and this is the way he put it down quite objectively:

"And as Jesus passed forth he saw a man
named Matthew sitting at the seat of
custom. And he said unto him, Follow
me. And he arose and followed him."

What a playwright couldn't do with a couple of actors like that! Think of the tremendous impact that could be made by two men on a stage, portraying for us the encounter that took place that day, a day that was so different in the life of a tax collector - -

" . . and Jesus came and said, follow me,
and he arose, and followed him . . . "

Come now, honestly, do you think it really happened just like that? Well before we answer that question let's take a good look at each of these characters separately, and then after that we'll put them together in the frame and turn the sound track on, that we might hear again the quality of those dynamic words, only two in number.....

...well first there's this carpenter's-apprentice-turned-preacher. He was getting around quite a bit these days. Wherever he went he seemed

to have spent his time preaching....talking with people....forever introducing the God-factor. Oh, every now and then He performed a wonder-work (we call them miracles)....and like as not in between he'd find some chap and say to him, "I could use you"....and the net result was that by this time a handful of men were following Him, no matter where He went. They found Him quite irresistible -- they just had to be in His company. So they spent their time with Him, looking, listening, learning.....well, that's the carpenter-son-turned-preacher, of whom it had been said that whenever He really got involved in another man's life, and that man was at all sensitive or responsive, a change began to set in. He brought a transforming touch. Now you have His picture, don't you?

Now focus on the other chap. I have to tell you some unpleasant things about him.....

...he was a social outcast. His fellow Jews despised him. He wasn't allowed to be enrolled as a member of the synagogue -- I have to tell you this -- the courts would not allow him to be a witness. They branded him as a man whose word was not to be trusted. By profession he was a money-gatherer -- he collected taxes for imperial Rome. ...now I've already told you how these tax collectors got their jobs. There was a time when they were auctioned off to the highest bidder... Rome would give the job to any man who was willing to say, "I'll take it under these conditions" . . . and one condition was, Rome would say to this man, "We expect so much revenue from your district -- now how you get it"(can you imagine this!)"-- how you get it is none of our business. You can bleed your people as much as you may see fit. . " (maybe they didn't talk like that, but that's the way you read between

the lines) . . . "but we do expect you to return to the Imperial Treasury of Rome so much revenue from your district . . . "

..Well you can imagine the variety of abuses that set in as the tax collector began to bleed his people, charging whatever the traffic would carry.

Well the abuses were so bad that by the time of Jesus they made some correction, and some reform was established. But nonetheless he was a tax collector, a publican, a man in the employment of the government, who dealt with public monies.

There were all kinds of taxes. Last night I was impressed -- one of the first two pictures to be shown on the screen by Mrs. Marie Einspruch in that very important Mission Study here in Bieber Hall was a scene of Capernaum....and as she narrated the pictures she said that Capernaum was a very important town....it was on a very important travel route....it was the home of Matthew, the tax collector.

Well now there he was, picture him, right there in that important location. It seemed as though anything and everything was taxed -- anything that passed through his town had a levy applied to it. If a cart came through, he had to count the number of wheels and tax the cart according to its wheels and the size of the axle. When they went into the market-place, there was always a tax on what was purchased and what was sold. And for the people who had an income, he had to decide how much he would levy against their earnings. When they traveled the road through Capernaum, there was a toll that had to be paid - - - no matter where they turned around, there was the outstretched palm of Levi they hated him.

They hated him for two reasons. First, for the way he bled them. And secondly because a devout Jew permitted himself to believe that only God was their king, and they weren't about to fill the treasury of an

earthly ruler, and to fill it by way of their own fellow-countryman, a tax collector.

Why do I make so much of this? For the simple reason that this was a day that was different in this man's life. And of all the people who might have been considered as a likely candidate to follow the Master of Men, you, I dare say, would not have chosen this tax collector. But Jesus did. He had a way of seeing the potential that lies underneath the surface. Now these dramatic words: "Follow me.".....Matthew simply records for us that he arose and followed Him.

But do you really think it happened like that? Whatever else you think of Jesus Christ, don't ever for a moment allow yourself to believe that He mesmerized people. I'm inclined to think that somewhere along the line Matthew had heard about Jesus Christ, somebody had spoken a favorable word - - - you won't forget that, will you? There are people who make some kind of a judgment regarding Jesus Christ by the favorable way other people speak about Him. And he may have heard about Jesus Christ before he actually heard Him for himself.

But then let's suppose there was that day when he heard Jesus preach. There was something about not only the way He said it but what He had to say himself that made a dent on his mind. He stood for so much integrity, He stood for so much manhood....and He was forever -- don't you ever forget it -- introducing the God-factor! -- the eternal dimension -- the thing that we'd have to deal with the day after tomorrow, and fifty years beyond that.

Now I like to think that all of this had happened before and I'd like to think that day by day when Matthew came back to this seat of custom, there was an increasing disdain for his day's work - - - "Where is it getting me, anyway?" He began to hate the fact that he was being hated. And perhaps he was discovering as he hadn't thought of it before, that there's

more in life than fingering money....collecting it....gathering it..... stealing it.....becoming a part of a bribe. Day by day he became increasingly disillusioned with the kind of thing that was claiming his energy hour after hour.....and then this day - -

- - there's always the possibility of the extraordinary day...Jesus Christ loomed upon the horizon and looked at him. And Matthew says, "He simply said to me, 'Follow me'" - - Matthew simply says, "I arose and followed Him."

But do you think, honestly now -- do you think he hesitated a bit? Do you think Jesus Christ had to stand there and say, "Well make up your mind, man -- it's today that the decision ought to be made!" Do you suppose Matthew sat down and tried to say to himself, What's going to happen to all the obligations that I've incurred?....what's going to happen if I have to reduce my standard of living?....what's going to happen to me?

...I don't know what went through his mind. I only know that Matthew had to record it this way, that the net result was that he found in this man from Nazareth an attraction that drew him, magnet-like, toward something better than what he had. This I most certainly believe.

This I most certainly believe, that sooner or later God through Jesus Christ looms upon the horizon of your life. I'm spending my years as a minister of the Gospel proclaiming this sort of thing. Let me put it for you this way, that eventually you're on the calling list of Jesus Christ. When He comes your way, He'll be inviting you to the plateau, to a hill, to some segment of life that's going to be finer and better than anything you have ever known before.

Now if you were to press me and say to follow Jesus Christ means you're going to go somewhere.....where? I don't know. Quite parenthetically now,

some day we will have to sit down and write all the new phrases and terminology that's come into the life of this congregation since we've developed a comprehensive Youth Ministry. It would be a good exercise! You know, each time we have a Summer Staff, they go searching for some slogan, some expression that's going to characterize their emphases. Well one summer they had two words -- FOLLOW ME -- and cleverly enough they emblazoned these words on sweat-shirts that they wore around in their activities here or walked the streets of Silver Spring. And one of our cute numbers was walking down the streets of Silver Spring with these words emblazoned behind her: FOLLOW MEand some character came up and said, "Where are you going, girlie?" -- a perfectly good question. But in all honesty, I'll have to tell you this, when Jesus Christ asks you to follow Him, I can't give you a blueprint, I can't give you a map, and say this is your personal program, this is where He is going to take you - - I can only tell you where He's taken me. And as the Pastor of this congregation I try to understand how He may lead people differently, into ways that perhaps may not be my cup of tea!

But the important thing may not be, where will He lead you? The important thing is whom will you allow to lead you? That's the acid test -- whom do you really follow in life? Who is your master? Alvin Rogness, bless his soul, once wrote about people who were caught up in this extraordinary day when the time of decision had arrived, and he said that they allowed themselves to believe that they can walk a thin line, and band themselves between God and Satan, between good and evil. It can't be done! He also tells about people sometimes, tourist-like, who want to know a measure of satisfaction in saying that they have been in this country and they have been in that country, if only to spend two hours in it -- and then they go back and go somewhere else -- they do that sometimes up in Canada,

people who go to Niagara Falls, you know, they want to be on both sides of the border, but they're not really making the decision. And so perhaps they decide to live either in Canada or in the United States -- explore its territory, put down their roots, establish their homes and raise their families and allow themselves to come under the laws of the land. By the same token, as far as Jesus Christ is concerned, it's risky business to allow yourself to think that you can take a sortie of this kingdom and a sortie into that kingdom -- in and out -- at your leisure, because as soon as you put foot down on a particular territory you are subject to the laws of that land. I warn you, my friend, as soon as you give a favorable glance to Jesus Christ, expect to be covered by His laws, by the power of His personality.

I don't tell you the whole story when I say I don't know where He may lead you -- by that I meant I don't know where He's going to lead you on this side of the Great Gate. But I can tell you, if you follow Him, what your destination will be. If I were a painter depicting Heaven, I think I would have somebody standing there at the portal and asking a question -- how did you get here? Then I'd give the title: "I Followed Someone Worth Following."

Now I'd like to say you're fortunate if you'll recognize the hymn tune that I've asked Mr. Clawson to play at this point, the tune of an old Gospel hymn. Maybe these words will come to your mind:

"I can hear my Saviour calling, I can hear my Saviour calling,
I can hear my Saviour calling, "Take my cross and follow me."

I'll go with Him through the garden, I'll go with Him through
the garden, I'll go with Him through the garden, I'll go
with Him all the way.

I'll go with Him through the Judgment, And He'll give me
grace and glory; where He leads me I will follow,
I'll go with Him all the way . . . "

I dare you to try it. Those who have look back to us from where
they are and say - - "It's worth it!"

....this I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

" A MAN NAMED JUDAS "

THROUGH Jesus Christ Thy Son
our Lord. Amen.

I dare say there are few passages in Scripture that sadden the heart of the devout believer as much as the passage that I am about to read for you now, a passage of Scripture that serves as the necessary background for all that follows. It is recorded as the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them . . . "

These Sunday mornings during Lent we've given to a consideration of "The Master and His Men" - - and I suppose the title for the series could well have been: "The Men Whom The Master Made" and you and I have known a measure of satisfaction in knowing how He took presumably a nobody and made a somebody out of him. That's always possible with the transforming touch of the Master-of-Men.

But I suppose psychologically I've heard you shouting from the depth of your hearts as I read this passage of Scripture for you, if you have any sensitivity at all, in unbelief you've said, "Oh no -- it cannot be!" But it did

happen.

He had twelve disciples -- He chose them individually, and personally. Of all the chapters that have ever been written, this is as thrilling as any, that God-Come-To-Us-In-The-Form-Of-Jesus-Christ should see fit to choose this man and that man to be with Him, and they should know the intimacy of His fellowship, that they might walk closely with Him and draw all the benefit that such a relationship should give.

We're thrilled when we realize what He was able to do with Peter, what He was able to do with Andrew, what He was able to do with John, what He was able to do with Matthew. And now I suppose the sub-title for today's sermon would have to be: "Judas -- A Man The Master Could Not Make."

Go ahead -- -- ask me that one-worded question: WHY?

I don't know. Oh, I have some ideas on the subject. And if I can be helpful at all, let me tell you some of the notions that have been advanced by other people, as I recall what I have read for a number of years . . .

-- there's a school of thought that maintains that Judas did what

he did because he was impatient. It wasn't that he didn't believe in his Master, but he believed so well in his Master that he felt it was high time now that the Master got with it. This was no longer the year of popularity -- this was the time of opposition. And this school of thought maintains that Judas honestly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that if He had to be cornered, then He'd declare His Messiah-ship, there'd be no question about it. So Judas, being the impatient one, precipitates a crisis, makes a situation. This would be it! Remember now, I said, "because he was impatient" -- he couldn't afford to wait as God allowed the situation to mature . . .

- - there are other people who say that Judas did what he did because he was avaricious. The wood carving that we have in the altar -- the boys and girls in the Catechetical Class easily, when I ask them to identify the disciples, find out who Judas is because he's clenching the money-bag. There are those who maintain because he dealt with money he became avaricious, he ran that risk more than any of the others. And then somewhere, somehow the diabolical scheme developed so that he could put his hand on 30 pieces of silver . . . one doesn't ask how he makes the money, it's simply that the money is to be had. Well, that's a notion that's been advanced . . .
- - then there's another notion that's been advanced -- Judas didn't come from the same section of the country as the others did. From the very beginning he considered himself an outsider -- never fully accepted. He allowed himself to be cursed by the notion that he never fully became one of the disciple band. Now closely related to that is this suggestion: that Judas never allowed himself to think that he quite made the disciple group. And the reason for that is this, they say. There was an inner circle - - - you read it for yourself, I've referred to it for you repeatedly: 'And then Jesus took with him Peter, James and John . . . ' Now get this closely, you who are sensitive -- there's a school of thought that maintains that Judas just couldn't hack it!
- . . . that time after time it seemed as though Jesus gave the nod to Peter, James and John . . . but never once turned in Judas' direction -- tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Judas,

after the meeting is over, if you and I could just sit down, there are some things I'd like to talk about -- I'd welcome your advice and counsel -- I'd like to tell, like you to tell me how you feel about it, Judas." But suppose we accept the notion that this never happened to Judas, and he had to suffer and endure the fact that again and again and ever so often it was "Peter - James - and John" who got the nod, and never Judas. He was sensitive, and he allowed himself to be that self-centered that he never quite got over it. And eventually the thing began to fester...and who knows when a thing begins to fester when and how it might burst. . .

Well there you have it, my friend. You pay your money and you take your choice. For myself, I don't mind telling you with this naive mind of mine, I settle for the fact that he allowed the Devil to get inside of him. And whatever may have been the nature and the character of the sin, it was that he would allow the Devil to have the ascendancy.

Well, after you've tried to answer the question Why?, is that all that can be said? Of course not. What do you make of it?

Well with all the strength that I can command, I think there are lessons to be learned from Judas:

One - - name any sin that appeals to you -- and by that I mean name any sin that you think might have been the sin that prompted Judas to do what he did -- impatience

-- avarice

-- self-centeredness

-- hurt ego

...name any sin, and this is what I will tell you: that you cannot afford to take any sin lightly! Because any sin can eventually lead to betrayal, and

self-destruction. One of the terrible things that has to be said about our generation is that we've lost our sense of sin, and not very many of us take sin seriously. With all the strength that I can command I say to you that no sin should ever be taken lightly. This is Lesson One that comes to me out of the life of Judas.

The second lesson is this: I honestly believe that somewhere along the line Judas may have become aware that he was less of a disciple than he should have been. Whatever may have been his weakness, I think he had his moments when he was absolutely aware of it. I think we're made that way! I don't think that we are totally blind to our weaknesses.

Now this is what I am about to suggest - - - how different it might have been if only on occasion, whatever it might have been, he would have gone to Jesus and said, "Jesus, I have a problem, and I don't know what to do with it. I'm never quite on top of it! I can't handle it by myself."

...now if I am speaking to your condition, my friend, I mean to speak to your condition because some of us go on beset by our sins because we're too proud to admit them or to seek help. I suggest to you that the story of Judas might have been different if he would have sought out his Master and said, "Master, help me!" . . . because I honestly believe that on occasion even Jesus Christ intimated to Judas, as was so definitely pronounced on that last night, that there was the sin of betrayal within him.

What else is a lesson that I think we can learn from Judas? I hesitate to tell you because I don't want you to exploit it. I know human nature. The other lesson is this, that even Jesus Christ couldn't win them all. Now that may trigger within you the notion that you at once can start writing off some people, and brand them a bad apple and irretrievably bent for Hell, and from that point on you can excuse yourself. But I have news for you, my

friend -- Jesus, knowing what Judas was, never wrote him off the books, and treated him with the same measure of love that He gave every single one of the other disciples.

I'm always caught up short when I think of what happened on Maundy Thursday, the very night He was betrayed -- the words of Institution for the Sacrament: "Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and blessed it, and gave it to them . . . " With the betrayal close at hand He never treated any of them with less than love, and most certainly not Judas.

Now there's one final word, if you don't mind. It's only a speculation, but the truth inherent in the speculation cannot be ignored. An artist once decided to paint an interpretation of the twelve disciples. He looked far and wide for one who showed the face of innocence and devotion. That was to be his John, the beloved disciple....

...for understandable reasons he chose to paint Judas last, and he waited and waited until he could find someone whose visual features best represented for him what Judas might have been. And when he found that character he painted Judas.....and according to the story, all the time he was painting the face of Judas he was haunted by something. There was something about that man that he had seen before.

Now maybe you've come to the conclusion -- the story ends in this manner: the man who sits for Judas had some time earlier sat for John. Which is simply to say there is always the possibility that we could fall from grace. And that's something to think about. But I'm happy to tell you in a very positive way, it doesn't have to happen.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN WORDS
FROM THE CROSS - Pastor Raymond Shaheen

Good Friday - 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

April 12, 1974

THE FIRST WORD

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

All

men alike die, but this is not to suggest that all men die in like manner. Some men die proudly. Some men die cowardly. Some men die with a curse upon their lips. Some men die as this one did: "Father, forgive them."

He was catalogued as *My Most Unforgettable Character* as I read about him in the pages of a magazine some years ago. He was a village priest somewhere in France. His name was Abbe De Ladudere. This is the episode that made him the unforgettable character:

...within the parish that he served there was a man who was physically deformed, and ugly to behold. He lacked a fair degree of intelligence. The townspeople laughed at him. They ridiculed him on every side. They even made songs about his sister....
...one night they pounced upon him and left him dead.

...it was the village priest, Abbe deLadudere, who gathered him into his own arms and took him into the church and placed his body before the altar. And then he rang the church bell. The people in that village were accustomed to gathering around the

church when the bell would be rung at an unusual time, and so they came. And he led them down the aisle and directed them to their seats. And when the last person had entered, the village priest, rising to his full stature as a man of God, pointed to the lifeless form, the man they had ridiculed and done to death. And then he spoke to them slowly and solemnly:

"In the time of judgment, when I stand before Him who made me a minister of His Word, I shall hear my Lord and Master say to me, 'Abbe de Ladudere, where are thy sheep?....and I shall not answer Him....
...and the second time I shall hear my Master, the great Kind and Head of the Church, say to me, 'Abbe de Ladudere, where are thy sheep?'.....and I shall not answer Him.....
....but a third time the Lord of the Church who made me a minister will say to me, 'Abbe de Ladudere, where are thy sheep?'.....and I shall say to Him, 'I had no sheep - - they were a fiendish pack of wolves -- they deserve to go to hell!'"

What a man is is determined always by what he might have said. Jesus Christ, hanging upon the cross in the dying moments, may have turned to God and said, "Send them to Hell, God -- who knows it better than I -- they're not worth saving! You wasted my life on them! This is what they have done to me - - - they don't deserve to go to Heaven. God, send them to hell . . . " This is what He might have said.

Or would you believe it, He might have said nothing at all! By this time His energy was spent. His love had been drawn out. He was left ab-

solutely numb. To think this would be the end!

What a man says is to be determined by what he might have said. This one is remembered because of what He did say as over against what He might have said - - - "Father, forgive them!"

...for this man died as He lived. Men are known by the way they live.....they may be remembered by the way they die.

* * *

Good Friday - 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

April 12, 1974

THE SECOND WORD

Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be
with me in Paradise.

We remember them well, and we count them carefully. This is the Second Word: "Today I say to you, you shall be with me in Paradise." Dare we believe that this is a special word of pardon that Jesus Christ gave to a dying thief? A special word of pardon? Why don't you reply quickly and say pardon is pardon. How can there be any difference -- if a man is forgiven a man is forgiven. Try as we will, it cannot be any other than a special kind of blessing that Jesus Christ gave to this man. For we have no record anywhere in Scripture that Jesus ever spoke to a man as He spoke to this one. He said to him "Today you shall be with me in Paradise."

Why did our Lord give to this, a revolutionary, a radical, a thief, so great a blessing? There's an interesting legend. You ought to hear it. So that you might not miss a word, let me read it for you exactly . . .

. . . there is a legend which makes this man a Judean Robin Hood, who robbed the rich to give to the poor. The loveliest legend tells how the Holy Family were attacked by robbers when they fled to Egypt. Jesus was saved by the kindness of a youth who was the son of the captain of a robber band. The little Baby Jesus was so lovely that the young man could not bear to lay hands on Him, but set Him free and said, "O most blessed of children, if ever there comes a time for having mercy on me, then remember me and forget not this hour . . .

So they say that the robber youth who had saved Jesus when He was a

baby met Him again on the cross at Calvary, and this time Jesus saved him.

A robber....a thief.....a revolutionary? Look at it this way, my friend -- it was a life that was mis-spent. No monument has ever been erected, no hymn has ever been written regarding this man who died. He's remembered for what he asked for, he's remembered for what he received. But seriously speaking, it was a life that was mis-spent. For as a thief and a robber he directed all of his energies to taking, to getting. Life was meant for sharing, for giving. In marked contrast, hanging there is Jesus, Lord of Life, who is remembered to the end of time and beyond -- not for what He took, but for what He gave.

Walter Russell Maltby, writing "A Song of The Manse" puts your plight and mine in this manner"

"When I was a child and had nothing to pay
They fed me and clothed me, day upon day,
She nursed me in measles and other such ills
And mended my clothes, and he paid the bills.
They hoped for me, feared for me, prayed for me too
And saved me from evil and carried me through
And I never knew how, and I never asked why
They should wear out their lives for a thing such as I.

Well, that was their way.
I was a child and had nothing to pay.

Those days are far gone: I grew to a man
A respectable person according to plan
Took sixteen in collars and wore a black coat
Political candidates called for my vote.
I wrote to the papers and gave them my views
And preached to the people all patient in pews,
I was paid once a month and had an account
At the bank, with a checkbook to show the amount.

Was it worth all God's trouble?
So much of my life is wood, hay, stubble.
So little is good that could meet His desire
So much of me bad, only fit for the fire.
If God calls for a reckoning, Ah! What shall I say?
Lord, this poor sinner has nothing to pay.

'Nothing to pay! Give him justice,' they say.
Nothing for nothing! Take him away!'

But God says, 'Stay,
Christ is for those who have nothing to pay.'

Well, that is God's way.
Christ is for those who have nothing to pay."

In closer look, you've discovered it, haven't you? -- The dying thief did not bargain. He didn't even so much as ask, if the legend should be a correct one, that Jesus should remember what he had done. He simply threw himself at the mercy of Christ.

...I have news for you, my friend. In the hour of
Judgment that's about the only thing that you and
I can do -- cry out for mercy. For we really
have nothing to pay.

* * * *

THE THIRD WORD

Woman, behold thy son! Son, behold thy mother!

Numbered among you, I count myself fortunate to have lived in a time when there was such a person as Winston Churchill, a man of unusual strength and integrity. Whenever I have been in London I think I have found myself, wittingly or unwittingly, recalling that time that might have been England's darkest hour during the Second World War.

The word had come to Winston Churchill that coal miners were threatening to strike, and this would give the crippling blow to their entire war effort. What now would this master-mind devise as the master stroke to avert the strike, the crippling blow? He sent out a call for the most responsible of all the leadership in England that could come to London on a particular night. And then he particularly asked for representatives of all the coal miners to be present. As only Winston Churchill could do, he put it on the line, and told them just how critical the hour really was, and how the winning of the war was being held in balance by what might happen that night, what decision they would come to.

And then he wrapped it all together as only Winston Churchill could, and he said, "I dream of a day when our troops come marching home. Can't you see them," he said, " - - they'll come from every part of the world to which they have been scattered, and some will hardly be able to walk at all...and perhaps some will be carried in the procession. I not only see them, but I can hear them -- and some of them will say to us who will be standing there,

'When we were where we were, doing what had to be done, where were you?'"

...they are the haunting strains of a Negro spiritual: "Were you
there when they crucified my Lord?"

I'm not so sure, had some of us been living at that time, that we would be able to answer in the affirmative. But a handful did answer in the affirmative:

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, his mother's sister, and Mary Magdalene, and John, the beloved disciple."

...they were there.

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he said unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son. And then he said to the disciple, Behold thy mother."

You may not have caught it. Be patient with me now when I bring it to your attention. Jesus Christ dying upon the cross has spoken now three words, none of which has to deal with himself. I told you, He died the way He lived: He was the man for others. His first word is the word of forgiveness for others who brought Him to His death. His second word is the word of forgiveness for a sinner. He came to be about His Father's business --

"His name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save people from their sins . . . "

...and even as His strength wanes He directs His energy to the thing for which He was born, and speaks the word of forgiveness to a sinner whose need was very great.

The third word that He speaks is the word that speaks the need to His saints, if you please. For want of a better term, look at it that way, that faithful band who tarried at the foot of the cross, who paid so great a price, and He is mindful of their needs. Saints have needs, too. Mary needed some-

one to love her. And John needed someone to love! The basic need of the human race, seen from our human perspective, is always the need which is love -- the ~~need~~ to love and to be loved.

Edwin McNeil Poteet, a distinguished Baptist minister of several generations ago, used to tell about the options that could have been open to Mary...

...she could have gone back to Bethlehem...

...but as the preacher said this afternoon, Bethlehem would have been filled with too many sad memories. It was the place where there was no room for them at the inn...

...she could have gone back to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up...

...and could she then have endured all the precious memories associated with Nazareth? -- where He went day after day to stand alongside of Joseph in the carpenter's shop -- in Nazareth where she packed the sandwiches so that He could go as only a dreamer would go, and lie flat on His belly on the hill that overlooked Nazareth, as He saw the caravans march to and fro to distant places.....she'd have deep thoughts of when He left Nazareth for the last time -- never again to return. No, she would not go back to Nazareth, and He didn't send her there.

She needed what John needed to give. He who is Love is mindful of our need, and the command that remains even as His strength wanes: "Love one another" -- "John, take my place! -- John, do for her what I would have done!"

Small wonder, then, that Martin Luther says if you want to know if the love of Christ dwells in you, then ask yourself if you've taken to your heart the need of another.

Good Friday - 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

April 12, 1974

THE FOURTH WORD

*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken
me?*

The Fourth Word -- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" -- it's a strange thing, I tell you, we just don't want to believe that Jesus Christ spoke these as one of the words from the cross. It's easy for us to listen to them as the reader stands at the sacred desk and tells you that they are the words of Psalm 22. But then when your attention is turned here to the pulpit and this man before you says they are the words spoken by Jesus Christ, some way, somehow, we just don't want to believe this. To us they are the words of weakness and despair.

The one thing that we don't want is a weak Christ, especially one who suffered despair. The one thing that we demand from our kings is that they don't topple from their thrones. The one thing that we can't tolerate in a god is that he should have feet of clay. But as I've told you so frequently when I've come to a difficult text, I cannot re-write Scripture -- I am not free to take a pair of scissors and clip out what I can't understand and what I don't want to believe. It remains as it was read -- the Fourth Word from the Cross, spoken by Jesus Christ -- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

They constitute a cry which is basically a stark and a lonely cry, a cry that I submit to you was just plain downright awful. There is nothing here of peace and tranquility. There is nothing here of hope, there is nothing here of love. These presumably are barren and bleak words -- the cry of a lonely one, of one who is terribly alone. And that's just why they

were spoken. There was that critical moment in His life before He died, when someone has said He carried to Himself the whole weight and the burden of your sin and my sin. And the most heinous aspect of sin is always this: that it alienates, that it separates from God. But when you and I are most conscious of our sin, we recognize it for what it is: alienation, a separation from God. Accept it that way, will you?

Or if you find it difficult to accept on that score, then let me ask you to turn your thoughts in this direction. . .

- - you have no trouble in believing, do you, that He got hungry, and He wanted food to satisfy those hunger pangs?

- - you have no trouble in believing, do you, that at night He was weary, and He slept?

- - you have no trouble in believing, do you, that He had a craving for human companionship, and He would frequent the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus as He did not go to any other home? . . . and He did have one disciple above all others for whom there was a measure of affection and in whose company He seemed to delight?

You shan't fault Him for this, will you -- because He was hungry and could become tired and weary? Why, then, if you want a Christ who understands your weakness, if you want a Saviour who understands the terrible aspect of sin, would you deny Him at the hand of God this awful moment, when in our behalf He did cry out as He did - - - but remember this and remember it well -- it was always My God. He never allowed God to lose His hold on Him. Nor did He ever call God anything other than the one in whom He would believe.

If He must take us beyond this awful burden of sin, then He'd have to endure the way through it. And that's precisely what I say to you this moment is - - the way through the dark and lonely path, the separation which is sin.

* * *

Good Friday - 7:30-9:00 p.m.

April 12, 1974

THE FIFTH WORD

I thirst

Only three words now remain. This now is the Fifth Word:

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things
were now accomplished, that the Scripture
might be fulfilled, said, I thirst"

Surely by this time you've said to yourself, it's all so different from anything that we've ever known before. This way of dying brings utter amazement to us. Now, only now, do we hear Him voicing any kind of concern for His own flesh.

Four other Words have already been spoken. How much time has passed I can't tell you. But I do know that sometime earlier they had placed His body against the wooden cross . . . they had taken the hammer and the spikes and driven it through His flesh . . . they had hoisted the cross, every bit the size, presumably, of the cross that you'll see when you leave the Nave tonight, when you look straight ahead....and once having hoisted it, with a thud they put it down into its socket, the hole in the ground -- with that jarring of the flesh, the tearing of the piercing spikes . . . but we have no record that He gave any kind of concern at all for His own physical pain. The introduction to this Fifth Word is revealing. You'll notice it says, "After this . . ."

When, just when did our Lord concern Himself with His own physical needs? It was only after the soul of Christ had met the needs of others that He first thought of Himself. This is the nature of perfect love.

Look what had gone before there was soul struggle, make no mistake about it - - if enemies were to be forgiven . . .

...think of the hell you've gone through before you decided to speak the word of forgiveness to somebody who had wronged you....think of the price you have had to pay until you'll make the decision to go to somebody who hates you, who has done you wrong, and you say to that person, the one who's hurt -- "I forgive you"

....He went through all this struggle, He paid this price, He did say, "Father, forgive them."

Think of the struggle He went through before He could say to the dying thief, "Alright, today you're forgiven -- today you'll get what your heart desires -- right now!"

...think of the struggle He must have experienced when He may have said to Himself, "Will he be any different than all the others that I've tried to love and to forgive? - - and what's going to happen if in one swell stroke I say to this man, the man with the mis-spent life, with his dying breath he cries for mercy and I say 'You can be forgiven' -- is forgiveness to be wasted on wastrels?"

Think of the struggle He went through as He decided upon taking that risk....think of the soul anguish to bid farewell to those who are nearest and dearest to you. Yesterday, or was it the day before, when making a pastoral call I stood and talked with a woman of this congregation who said, "I've just come back from having said goodbye to my mother. She has terminal cancer. I don't know that I will ever see her again before she dies." - - -

- - think of the pain that Christ endured when He said goodbye to Mary, and when He said goodbye to that one disciple who towered above all the others... ..think of the energy that was spent....think of the loneliness of the soul when He cries out to a God that He knows is there, but waits to be able to read all over again the lines of love on His face.

Now, having paid the price for each one of these episodes, and having come through triumphantly, He concerns himself with His own physical need. Now, He says, "I thirst." And have you noticed that we have reason to believe that He didn't look at anyone in particular, as to say, "You, Rod, you go get me something to drink!" . . . "You, Pete DeVries, you go get me something to drink!" . . . "You, Marcella - - - " We have reason to believe that it was an invitation in general.

And I think maybe that's the way God speaks ever so often -- "To-Whom-It-May-Concern" - - and only the spiritually sensitive respond. There was one who did hear Him...there was one who did volunteer. What was his name? You don't know, do you? He didn't much care whether he'd be remembered or not. Jesus Christ gloriously gives somebody a chance to meet His need. In that whole sea of wickedness in front of Him, in that whole mass of inhumanity, He dares to believe that there might be someone responsive enough and sensitive enough to be good enough to do something gracious.

....and I believe that in this world of wickedness today

God has not changed His mind - - He's still saying to all of us:

"To-Whom-It-May-Concern" -- "Here's your chance to do something
for Me - - !"

MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN WORDS
FROM THE CROSS - Pastor Raymond Shaheen

Good Friday - 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

April 12, 1974

THE SIXTH WORD

It is finished.

(introductory sentence inaudible)

Jerusalem. Not very long, in fact only minutes before He died, He shouted one word, the next to the last word that He was to speak before His broken body became limp by death. His next to the last word was a brief triumphant word: "It is finished."

Note it and note it well, He did not give way to death with a whimper. Whatever else T. S. Eliot had in mind, his description does not apply here when he wrote, "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but with a whimper." God's world does not end with a whimper. I cherish recalling the stage and screen production of "Green Pastures." It has episode after episode that does speak to my need. But for the moment I'm putting aside that scene where there is a reverent and powerful passage with God looking down from a window in Heaven and watching what is happening on the cross. On stage there is a moment of silence, a moment of silence that's prompted because everyone is aware of the fact that God is watching. And all at once God is seen to cover His face with His hands . . . as much as to say, "Oh no, it can't end like this!"

- - I'm putting that interpretation aside, my friend, because whatever else the author of "Green Pastures" has done for me, he doesn't speak

to my soul at this point. For God is not embarrassed by the way Calvary ends. God does not put His hands to His ears when Jesus Christ says, "It is finished." If anything, my interpretation would be that God claps His hands and says, "Bravo!" - - "Tremendous!"

...for that's how these words are to be interpreted. Not the words of man who says in relief, "It's all over, thank God -- it's ended!"

I do not number myself among those who believe that Jesus Christ despaired of living. I think He had great zest for living. I think despite the fact that He was keenly aware of our sin He thoroughly enjoyed having been here on earth. And again and ever so often He tried to cheer us up -- those were His very words: "Be of good cheer - - don't be sad-hearted." Jesus Christ was no Sad Sack, and I'm still waiting for an artist bold enough and brave enough and sensitive enough to give me a picture of Jesus Christ with a smile upon His face, happily content to have lived.

And when I read the Scriptures, when it says, "He steadfastly set His face to Jerusalem" - - it means He was determined to see it through, knowing full well what would happen would happen. Now He's able to say, "It is finished" ...a sense of accomplishment, a sense of achievement. He is the one who said, "My meet is to do the will of him who sent me."

I carry around in my wallet, as I have told some of you, the handwriting of a man for whom I have the deepest regard and affection, a quotation from a book that he read: "There are two great moments in the life of any man: the moment when he's perfectly aware of the fact that he was actually born into this world, and the second moment when he becomes aware of the fact that he

was born for a purpose - - - why he was born."

Jesus Christ lived and moved throughout this seemingly vale of tears

...what a glorious Hallelujah! - - - It's finished!

- - - It's accomplished! - - - It's achieved!

* * *

MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN WORDS
FROM THE CROSS - Pastor Raymond Shaheen

Good Friday - 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

April 12, 1974

THE SEVENTH WORD

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Some years back when I began my ministry it occurred to me that no ordinary prayer would do when I stood by the bedside of a woman who had become a mother -- for here was the gift of life, the marvel of a brand new child coming into this world. The fact in itself which would always cause any man to bow his head with respect, gratitude -- the wonder of God at work in a way such as this. And then it happened that this prayer was formed, which I dare say almost invariably I offer when I make the visit to the new mother:

O Lord, Grant to this, Thy servant,
the joy that only a mother can know,
in the name of the Christ who came
as a child and made the heart of
Mary glad . . .

I suggest to you that it's not too much to believe that if ever the heart of Mary was made glad, it was made glad when she heard that these were the final words spoken by her Son, the last of the Seven Words from the Cross:

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

For there are those who tell us, and beautifully so, that these were the words that Mary may have taught Jesus to memorize when He was a child -- a bit of Scripture, if you please, that she asked Him never to forget -- the glorious truth that God is always to be trusted with one's life.

Choose carefully what you ask your children to remember. Oh, I'm fully aware of it that they don't always understand when I encourage the members

of the Confirmation Class to choose a Confirmation verse, or when we had those personal sessions in Bethany I would ask them to recite for me their Confirmation verse. And then I'd say something that perhaps they forget all too easily, and yet I'd like to believe they would remember -- whenever you come to receive the Communion, and you wait at the Communion rail, recall your Confirmation verse. . . . in any moment of deep struggle in your life, recall your Confirmation verse. Choose carefully, my friend, what you teach young people to memorize. One never knows when it may hold them in good stead.

And now the last Word from the Cross. How shall I interpret it for you? As freely as I possibly can:

"Father - I still trust you. If I had it to do all over again, I want you to know I wouldn't ask you to change my life one bit."

How different from the way you and I talk! The one reason why some of us cherish and prize the future is that it always holds before us the possibility of changing what has been -- -- "The Almighty and Merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins -- time for amendment of life . . . "

...that's the gift of the future that might serve as an opportunity for a corrective, to do it differently. But in the dying moments of our Blessed Master -- -- "Father, I still trust you -- I'd still say to you, I'd do it all over again!"

All over again?

-- all of it?

-- betrayal?.....denial?...the forsaking by those whom

He trusts? -- He who said, Blessed are the meek --

-- is this the road the meek must take, that ends when
men kill them without mercy?

"Father, I'd do it all over again."

This is why we remember Him, you see. All men alike die, but all men
do not die in like manner. This one was different.

Said a wise man, I have often thought that if I had any doubts at all
as to the divinity of Jesus Christ, this (meaning the confronting of the
fact of the crucifixion) would be the place it would be resolved - -

-- I can see how a man might doubt Jesus, in spite of His
virgin birth....

-- I can understand how a man might examine the record of His
miracles, and still not be convinced of His deity.....
...but I cannot understand how anyone could go to the foot of the
Cross, and listen to the Words to which we've paid heed tonight,
and not confess Him as Lord and Saviour.

To the end of time the world will be haunted by that strange man on
the Cross, and some of us will come to Him and say - -

How can I choose but love Thee,
God's dear Son,
O Jesus, loveliest and most loving one;
Were there no heaven to gain,
no hell to flee,
For what Thou art alone I must love Thee . . .

* * * *

BECAUSE OF what did happen on this day
that we celebrate, I can now say unto
you: Grace, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen.

The brother of our Assistant Pastor once sent me a cartoon. The cartoon,
as he thought, would appeal to his father, was the description of a church bul-
letin board, and on the church bulletin board these words were to be found:

"A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE YOU:
THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

And underneath the cartoon in his own hand had written: "What a great idea!
- - too bad it never caught on"

One can say that sort of thing about the Resurrection truth. The word
that was spoken in the Resurrection Garden was simply this:

"He is not here - - He's risen as He said . . . "

One of the strange things about the human race is simply that we don't
always take to new ideas. I frankly confess to you for myself, when I first
heard him say it a decade or so ago, that is, the voice of the young President,
John Fitzgerald Kennedy, in a significant address that he made. A decade or
so ago he said, "The man is now living who one day will put foot upon the
surface of the moon." Not being privy to some of the information that some
of you had because of your profession, or because of your scientific orienta-
tion, I did not find it an easy thing to believe. A great idea, of course --
'twould be wonderful if it would catch on.

Then there was that lady across the shores, of whom I read the other day,
who even though she saw it on the television screen -- man putting his foot

upon the surface of the moon for the first time -- refused to believe it. She simply said, "It was a concoction of the American government -- a clever propaganda trick, and to this very day they tell me she remains unconvinced. It's a fact, however, and a fact that has influenced the course of events.

By the same token I remind you now of the Resurrection Truth. There were those who refused to believe that it actually happened. There are those who, even though they might have the same kind of evidence that this woman across the shores had -- actual re-production of the event --

...or if we had first-hand the journalist who stood there to record the event, a tape recording of the voice of the angel, a tape recording of the voice even of our Blessed Lord....

....there would still be those who would say, "I do not believe it."

In one of the Gospel lessons that's chosen to be read on this day, there's a matter of record that there were those present then and there who were told, at the very beginning, this tremendous truth, and their response, it seemed to them like an idle tale. I'm not troubled nearly so much this morning by those who deliberately refused to believe as I am troubled by those who once believed, but do not live as though it were true.

Our sister Lutheran congregation at Thomas Circle, Luther Place Memorial Church, proudly lists, I am told, among its roster of former Pastors the name of Lloyd C. Douglas. There was a time in his life when he felt that God was calling him away from the pulpit, and that God meant for him to impress upon people truth by the written word. And so he became an author.

Among the novels that he wrote, readily there comes to your mind now

undoubtedly the novel entitled "The Robe." In "The Robe" there was a character named Marcellus, who had become a convert to the Christian faith. Quickly he goes to his fiancée Diana and he tells her about this wonderful thing that has happened to him. But Diana, not about to be persuaded, says to Marcellus, "But let's pretend that it never happened . . . let's go on as though it weren't true." You see, it simply wasn't for her, and Marcellus is supposed to have answered to her words of this type: "But, Diana, I can't go on as though it didn't happen. This thing now affects my whole life." It's a study of two people, the one who wills to believe, and the other who doesn't want to believe.

Poor Diana, you see, she was imprisoned by notions of the past, the idea of a God who wasn't big enough to do something as great as the Resurrection. She was far more comfortable with the old ideas . . . somewhat like the Australian aborigine who had a chance to get a brand new boomerang, but it never caught on with him because he never succeeded in throwing the old one away. So there are people like that in their Christian experience. They have old notions of God and they've never succeeded in having them, in having done with them. The notion of a God who could bring a man from the dead, the notion that love could be stronger than hate, that good could outlast evil - - - a brand new notion.

The Christian church celebrates today the fact of the Resurrection. What is the meaning of the central truth of the Christian faith? -- Jesus Christ is alive! And what difference does this make to a man? How could it be that each of us could also be as Marcellus and say, "It affects my whole life"? Let me suggest to you at least two things.

One, the central truth of the Resurrection reminds us that life goes on.

The grave is not the end. Somebody once said to Robert Frost, "What has life taught you? - - What is the lesson of life?" And immediately Robert Frost replied: "The lesson of life is that life goes on!" Well that's a lesson of the Resurrection, but not the lesson. The second lesson is far more important. According to the Christian understanding of life, rooted and grounded in the Resurrection Truth, life goes on triumphantly, and life goes on according to God's terms.

An eighteen-year-old committed suicide and left a suicide note. The note read something like this:

"I made a bargain with God. I told God
that life wasn't turning out as I would
like to have it turn out, and I gave him a
year in which to do something about it, and
if there would be no change, then I would
end it all. Well, a year has come and gone,
and God hasn't come through."

...the mistake that she made, of course, was that she was dictating to God the terms on which life was to be lived and it was to be lived according to her terms. And when man tries to dictate to God the terms upon which he wants to live, he winds up with strife, and envy, and hostility, and tensionbecause he never quite gets over the hurdle of trying to see life lived on God's terms. Life was meant to go on, and the Resurrection says it's meant to go on on God's terms....gloriously....triumphantly.

Now the text for this brief meditation -- the words of our Lord and Saviour. You will find them in the 14th chapter according to John:

"Because I live, you too shall live."

It's wonderful to have the deep questions of life answered to your satisfaction, honestly now. The question of the Old Testament is this question: If a man

dies, shall he live again? Job had some ideas as to the answer when he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

...but it wasn't until Jesus Christ came that Jesus Christ was able to say, "Because I live -- there shall be no question about it -- you, too, shall live -- not somehow, but triumphantly.

I've told some of you, several days ago I stood face to face with a member of this congregation who went half-way across the continent to be by the bedside of her dying mother. She said to me, "I went to say goodbye to my mother. She has terminal cancer - - I don't expect to see her again before she dies." But as I stood and talked with this parishioner, a fellow member of yours, it was made very plain to me that because of the Resurrection Truth this family has the assurance of Jesus Christ.....death is not the end!life goes on! But I say to you with all the strength that I can command, immediately now, you don't have to wait until the moment of death to be given this assurance. For the believer, right now he's caught up with the quality of life which is eternal, because of the way Jesus Christ lived, died, and lives eternally.

And that's the dimension, you see, that we need most -- it's the greatest single moral challenge that comes to us.

It's a great idea, my friend...."because I live,

you, too, shall live -- not somehow, but triumphantly."

....I dare you to let it catch on!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO BE USED BY GOD"

FOR A little while now, O God, in this place we'll try to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. We'd like to make the most of it. And to that end we ask now that Your Holy Spirit may help us. Amen.

I've discovered that there's more than one useful purpose that I'm expected to serve when I sit at the family dinner table. For one thing, I'm expected either to offer Grace or to see that somebody else offers the table prayer. Then secondly, as a proper host, I should see that good conversation is engendered as we sit at the family table for dinner. Then I've discovered in recent years that there's a third useful purpose that I'm expected to serve.

Not far from where I sit at the head of the table is an antique china closet. It was given to Winifred's parents when they began their housekeeping years more than three-quarters of a century ago. It has, as you might picture now, that curved plate of glass in the front. It's now become a very valuable piece. And even when they first got it, Mother Heim and Father Heim looked upon it as a prized possession.....

....and as their children came into their lives they were constantly on guard, of course, so the family cry went out:

"Thomas! -- stay away from the china closet!"

"Winifred! - - Elizabeth! - - if you have to play,
play at the other end of the room! - - - "

...then it was: "Karl, Jr! - Barbara! - Richard!

- David! - Jon! -- stay away from the china closet!"

...and now I find myself saying:

"Timothy! - Christopher! -- stay away from the china closet!"

It was in that china closet Winifred has some precious pieces. And the other day as I sat there and looked at that china closet, happy in the thought, of course, that the glass remains unbroken, I observed the things that she keeps on the shelves....and how seldom she uses them. And when I brought this to her attention, she said, "But we do use them, on certain special occasions."

Now all of this leads me to a text in the Bible -- 2 Timothy, the second chapter, the 21st verse:

" . . . a vessel unto honor, meet
for the master's use . . . "

Just as in that china closet there are certain things that Winifred brings out only, if you please, on so-called state occasions, for very special use, so the writer of this Second Letter to Timothy was saying, "A Christian should be looked upon as someone who is kept for very special use by the Master." Now this is the introduction to this sermon. Try not to forget it, will you, particularly its relationship to the specific text which serves as the basis for this sermon. And we'll come back and we'll try to wrap it up as the sermon concludes.

Now let me say to you the understatement of the year: All is not well with the world. Which leads me to quickly observe that ours is a generation that is living from one major disappointment to another, and that is part of

the illness of our time -- we don't quite know how to handle disappointment, we don't quite know how to handle disillusionment. And yet, quite frankly, the shadow of disappointment and disillusionment is something that's been cast upon some of us from the very day that we were born.

- - some of us in this place were born shortly after the Great War, or while the Great War was being fought, and then when we went off to school we read in the history books that there was a man who was President of the United States of America who said "We enter this conflict because the world must be made safe for democracy!" - - and we have had high hopes for democracy.....but in this day and in this age we look upon the democratic process, and some of us are disappointed. Because of the democratic process we've given to certain leaders a mandate, and then we have been disappointed with their performance . . .
- - after World War II we thought in terms of the United Nations, and we had high hopes.....but one doesn't have to be a cynic to say, Where do they lead us? - - what is the practical worth? And throughout the 60's, you see, despite the fact that there was United Nations, we saw the slaughter in Southeast Asia, and this instrument for peace for which we had high hopes seemed absolutely powerless....and we are disappointed . . .
- - we had a great crop of babies on our hands, we talked about the 'baby boom' -- and they grew up to be teenagers and college studentsand some of them pushed, and some of them shoved, and some of them made light of some of the very things that some of us have cherished.....and we were disappointed - - despite the fact that

they did touch a sensitive nerve in the body politic - - but most of us have walked away, and were disappointed . . .

- - we built more school buildings, educated more people to teach . . .but we have a generation of students on our hands, and we shake our heads and wonder yet why Johnnie can't read, and why Johnnie can't remember what he's been taught . . .
- - we poured all kinds of money into theological seminaries, and we had high hopes for a crop of preachers that might make the Kingdom much more of a reality than ever before, and we gave them all kinds of tools, and gave them all kinds of buildings and facilities.....only to discover that ours is a generation of declining church attendance, and weak pulpits, and where society at large looks to other agencies and instrumentalities rather than to the pulpit or even to the church for dynamic leadership . . .

We are disappointed.

- - for a while we marveled at the work of the electronic medium industry only to discover that eventually we would call the television the "idiot tube" and the "monster in the living room." We had high hopes....but we were disappointed.

And I stand among you as one who has had to fight a constant battle against the de-humanizing spirit of man, because we have had one disappointment after another.

What now can I say to you? Have you come to this place only to have a man stand at the sacred desk and say that we live in a time of disappointing experiences? Have you come to this place only to have a man occupy your time for a brief period and yet to repeat again and again, we live in a time

of major disappointment? . . . and to share with you a moment of despondency and gloom? Surely this is not what brings you here. And this is not what brings me to the sacred desk! So let's move on quickly.

First, I am in a position to tell you that we are not the first to be disappointed. We are not the first to look upon the entire horizon that surrounds us and to say, All is not well. If one takes the historical perspective, you'll understand why I can say to you:

...in 1848 Lord Shaftsbury said, "Nothing can save the British Empire from shipwreck!"

...in 1849 Disraeli said, "In industry, commerce and agriculture there is no hope!"

...in 1852 the dying Duke of Wellington said, "I thank God I shall be spared from seeing the consummation of ruin that is gathering about us!"

...in 1801 Wilberforce said, "I dare not marry - the future is too unsettled!"

...in 1806 William Pitt observed, "There is scarcely anything around us but ruin and despair!"

So I say to you very quickly, we are not the first to feel this way. It may be an affliction that comes upon every generation. Maybe the historical perspective will force us to believe that there has never been a so-called ideal time in which to live. For perhaps every generation has been afflicted with either a measure of nostalgia -- looking back to a better day that was, and lamenting the fact that they no longer have it . . . or perhaps despairing the present, long for a future that could be far better than the present hour. Perhaps any careful reading of history could bring us to that kind of conclusion. Well, this needs to be said: suffer as we may from despair and disillusionment and discouragement, has there ever been an ideal time in

which to live?

Then I must move on to remind you that one doesn't have to be a theologian to say what I'm about to say. But there is some kind of progress that is being made on the human scene. If you had the proper spectacles, perhaps as he reads history one could discover that there is a golden thread, scarcely discernible perhaps at times, but ever present, which has been leading us on to some better stage.....so that every generation has been part of something better that is being fashioned.

Someone has said that if we reduce the existence of this planet to a 50-year span, it will take 49 of those 50 years until we have any kind of agriculture beyond the primitive stage....

...and in that span of 50 years, writing began only 6 months ago...

...printing only two weeks ago....electricity less than 24 hours ago....

....organized efforts after world-wide peace a few months ago...

...and civil rights, with equal justice toward all came upon the scene only a matter of a few seconds ago....

...if you were to reduce life on the planet to a 50-year span. Which is simply to say that despair and discouragement, progress is being made. We are inching along toward something better.

But let's be very helpful now, if we can. What am I to say to myself? What are you to say to yourself? when you're about to succumb to the series of major disappointments that we're experiencing in our day? How can you fight the battle of cynicism? How can you fight the battle of meaninglessness? How can you fight the battle of uselessness? For against such a background we are prone to say to ourselves, What's the use?

Well I'm happy to bring to your attention that one day, maybe some two thousand years ago, there was a carpenter's son, turned preacher. He spent

a great deal of His time just talking with people, and always trying to introduce the God-factor -- the eternal dimension -- always trying to impress upon them the fact that any life was meant to be important. And that God had use for every single one of them.

Now, my friend, it may not be your lot to go to Capitol Hill....it may not be your lot in life to go to Rockville and sit in the chamber of our County Council....it may not be your lot in life to go to Annapolis. And if you were to ask me, what then is God's plan for my life? -- Specifically, I don't know. But I can always tell you what it includes. It includes a responsibility of making your life accountable in God's sight for some good things. And that some good thing will always include making somebody else's life a little bit better. You begin where you are with what you have.

John F. Kennedy was absolutely right when in one of his addresses he said, "The longest journey always begins with a single step" -- and I would add, -- no matter how short!

And I would say to you with all the strength that I can command, when you and I deplore the fact that we live in a world as wicked as ours, or as disappointing as you find it to be, and you say that the world is peopled with rascals, then I would say to you, your responsibility and my responsibility is to see that there's one less rascal in the world -- that's the point at which you begin!

I'm reminding you that in that place called Galilee there was this carpenter's son, who never got a college education, who never ended with a bank balance to His credit, who never travelled perhaps a hundred miles from the place where He was born. But the world has never been the same since He lived. And why? -- because He made it His business to make His life count as one life, where He was....to the people He touched.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE SET OF THE SOUL"

AS A plant turns toward the sun,
O God, even so our souls turn in
your direction, for we are meant
to respond to you. Let Thy truth
be made plain to us now, as we
look in Your direction. Through
Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord.
Amen.

Acts 1, 25

I want always to be nothing less than honest with you,
which leads me to tell you that I'm not at all happy with the
first part of the sermon this morning that I'm about to preach.
For the sermon deals with a man who went to Hell.

Now he didn't have to go to Hell. But nobody could stop
him from going to Hell, because he didn't want anybody to stop
him from going to Hell, not even Jesus Christ himself.

The title for this sermon is "The Set of The Soul" and
the text is the 25th verse of the first chapter of the Book of
the Acts of the Apostles:

"Judas fell from the apostles
that he might go to his own
place."

Do you remember how it is in Rogers and Hammerstein's
Carrousel? - - a young man and a young woman day-dream about how
wonderful their life together will be. In the lyrics which they
sing comes this line: "When today is a long time ago . . ." So
lovers think of the passing of the years and dream of even brighter
and better days yet to come. The future does unfold, you see, and

every today has a tomorrow. But what also needs to be remembered is that every day has a yesterday!

Mary Ann Shepherd, in appreciation for her years here at Saint Luke, once gave us a sampler which now hangs on a wall in one of the rooms at the Parsonage. It reads like this:

"All The Flowers of All The
Tomorrows Are in The Seeds
of Today"

...which is simply to suggest that today determines tomorrow, all other things being equal.

Now let me talk to you about a man whose tomorrow did come, a tomorrow that was determined by all of his yesterdays. The Biblical recorder puts it down this way as he thinks of Judas Iscariot -- the last time that any mention is made about him at all, he is dismissed with this veiled reference:

"He went to his own place . . ."

What now shall we make of this way of putting it? Are we to believe that in the final analysis each one of us ends up very much where he wants most to be? Do we really chart our own course? -- set our own sail? -- determine our own fate? Take a closer look at Judas Iscariot. He was numbered among the Master's men -- he was personally chosen by Jesus Christ. There was that time when Jesus Christ came to him and pointed His finger at him and said, "You're my man!" -- and then He allowed him to be within the company of the twelve. They were all exposed to the same Master, they shared the same fellowship, they listened to the same teachings, they were involved with the same Jesus Christ. We have no reason to believe whatsoever, God forbid, that Jesus Christ ever slighted Judas Iscariot, or any of the disciples as far as that's concerned. He loved them equally well. But the Bible record portrays Judas Iscariot for us as the betrayer.

Did it just happen? On that night of the betrayal, was he powerless at the time? Was he suddenly possessed by a force which he could not resist? The Bible, let it be said again, accounts for him finally by simply stating: "He went to his own place".....which is simply to say, "He arrived at the point where he had been heading."

A wise man once observed that there's a principle here which works in our lives. We do go, each one to his own place. We find our own level according to the secret desire or motivation which is in our hearts. We gather around us the kind of people that we secretly like. We find the friends who are with us one in spirit. We read the books that we want to read...we go to the places to which we want to go....we turn the channel on the television set to the program that we want to view. We make our own world. It can be simply said in that manner.

But now let me hasten to say, children are brought up in the same home -- they have the same teaching -- they have the same opportunities. But as they grow older and pass out of the home, each one goes to his own place . . .

...one seeks for money and pleasure

...another seeks ways of serving his fellow men

...another, maybe, breaks away from the family tradition and

indulges his lower tastes and inclinations.....

Oliver Wendell Holmes, bless his soul, compares it to the course of two rivers. They rise in the same mountain-side, but they flow in different directions until a whole continent divides their waters. So people take their different ways in life according to the set of their souls. The poet put it this way:

"From the same cradle-side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to lone darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the placid sea."

That sounds, wouldn't you say, as though we pretty much determine the circumstances in which we eventually find ourselves. An awesome fact, to say the least.

It could be, my friend, that wherever you happen to be right now -- look carefully -- you're probably there amid the circumstances that surround you because at one time or another you either chose to head in that direction or you allowed yourself to drift. In the Southwest there's a road marker. The upright post has two arms on it. You recognize it of course as you visualize it - - - the one side reads Albuquerque...the other reads Los Angeles. And at that particular point you make the decision -- you'll either end up in Los Angeles or you'll end up in Albuquerque. And if you're not sure where you want to go you may even flip a coin to decide in which direction you're going to travel, but even the flipping of the coin does not allow you to escape from an element of responsibility. You can't have it both ways! You can't be in Albuquerque and Los Angeles at the same time. It's one....or the other. And there's always the element of responsibility, which cannot be escaped!

I have little patience with so-called therapeutic measures that are always trying to excuse people from the element of responsibility. God endowed us with the capability of making a choice, and man is never as much a man as he's meant to be, aside from the fact that when he brings honor and glory to God in loving and serving Him, as when he exercises wisely and well his freedom to choose. Let it be said again and let it be said firmly, whether we care to accept it or not, where we are and the circumstances that may surround us, the situation prevails because that's the direction in which we headed or allowed ourselves to drift, all other things being equal.

Now let me move on very quickly to suggest to you that while this may be true in the realm of circumstances, it is also true in the realm of char-

acter. We become what we are in our hearts. We become what we secretly desire. Life has a way of giving us what we really want! - - if not by actual condition, then certainly by fashioning the character that seeks such things.

I'm numbered among those who lament the fact that one of the things that has passed from the public school scene in many areas is the memorization of poetry. Some of us remember when we were in school, how a requirement was each month that we memorize a given poem, a poem, I presume, that was naturally very carefully chosen that it might inculcate in us at an impressionable age ideals, basic principles of morality and virtue. There was a day when we used to talk much about being "loyal to the royal that is within." We introduced into our curricula body-building courses because we honestly believed that American manhood should be physically fit. Important as that may be, I suggest to you that it's even more important that we should be spiritually trim and vigorous in our morality.

Pelonius says to his son, doesn't he, in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" - - "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, that thou canst not then be false to any man." Periodically a man must take himself to task, to ask himself the question as to what kind of person he is becoming, for eventually far more important than what a man has is what a man is, and we're always dealing with the material out of which tomorrow is being fashioned. Tomorrow does come, and it's built upon all the yesterdays that have come and gone.....which is simply to suggest to you that somewhere along the line Judas Iscariot might have taken stock of himself, to see in what direction he was actually heading. He just did not become the betrayer overnight.

In the tragedy of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Creon is to have said, to the rejected king: "You are not longer an authority. But once when you were in

authority, you brought upon yourself the seeds of your own destruction." - - an awesome thought. But wouldn't it be a terrible thing if this was all I had to say to you this morning! But there's the other side of the coin, and the far more glorious side. As a man may choose to go to Hell, he may also choose to go to Heaven. To every man there opens a high way and a low, and each man decides the way his soul will go . . . and the grand and glorious thought is that Jesus Christ, the pilgrim of the way, is always wooing us in His direction, He's always sending out those gracious intimations of the spirit -- "Follow me -- come after me." He's always saying to us, "I will not leave you, I will not forsake you, I will always surround you with my power and with my love - - I will never fail you!"

John Henry Newman said, "God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nought. I shall do good. I shall do His work." Somewhere along the line Judas Iscariot forgot to talk like that to himself, and all the Biblical recorder then could say about him: "Having found his own level, he went to his own place" . . . but Judas Iscariot didn't have to go to Hell.

Come now, what do you think is the most important single question that a man can put to himself? It's not a question, mark you, that you are supposed to apply for the moment to somebody else. Most of us are quite good at putting questions to others. But the real test of character may lie in the questions we ask ourselves and the answers we give. Of all such questions, I suggest to you now, the most important is this: What is the secret longing of my heart?
- - What do I want most from life?

...for remember, life has a way of giving us what we want
most, if not in circumstance, then most certainly in character.

* * *

"ON GETTING TO KNOW GOD"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Job 22:21

The title for this sermon is "Getting to Know God" and the text is from the Book of Job -- it's the 21st verse of the 22nd chapter:

"Acquaint now thyself with God and
be at peace . . . "

Tell me, just where does the preacher begin with a text such as this?
Let me read it for you again:

"Acquaint now thyself with God and be at peace."

- - which is the greater
problem, the fact that people do not know God as well as they should, or
the fact that people lack peace? As far as Job is concerned, maybe there
is no problem at all -- it's a situation of both/and, because no matter how
you read the text you come to the same conclusion: because people don't know
God better than they do they are not at peace, and they will have peace once
they really come to know God as He is, and draw their spiritual resources
from Him which will enable them to be made adequate in the time of any need.

Whether people realize it or not, down deep inside them there is this
craving for peace. To the everlasting credit, I presume, to one of the il-
lustrious predecessors in this pulpit, the Rev. Dr. Raymond Sorrick, who I
suppose was more instrumental than any other person in choosing the words
to be carved into the stone arch above the red doors to this place. Perhaps
you're numbered among the two-thirds of this congregation who come from this

side into the Nave, and perchance if you do come through the red doors you may not look up. In case you haven't, let me tell you now what those words are: "MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU" . . . and I'm absolutely confident that there are some people who keep coming back to this place, Sunday by Sunday, for the measure of peace which they do gain from the hour that they spend here.

Peace is what we crave -- to be at peace with ourselves -- for any number of us, day by day, a constant battle goes on inside us, a whole civil war is going on....

- - some of us have to face the battle that goes on when we think in terms of the encounter that must be ours as we face other people -- if only we knew how to get along with them. Like as not for some people the lesson that has to be mastered isn't so much how to work with people as to work around them, because they are so formidable, and inescapable

I've discovered that there are some people who stock up their medicine cabinet with tablet after tablet and capsule after capsule, just because they want the assurance that they can reach out for something that will guarantee them some measure of tranquility when they have to face the ever-demanding moments of life in the course of any given day . . .

- - and there are some folks who anticipate a difficult situation -- they know they can't escape it, but they dread the thought of the tensions and the hostilities that will arise once they have to face other people, so they do their best to persuade the family physician to give them a prescription that will guarantee them tranquility, so great is the craving . . .

We are not a people at peace with ourselves. We are not a people at

peace with one another. We are not a people at peace with even other nations in the world. Men crave peace. The writer of the Book of Job says, "You don't have peace because you don't know God as He is -- and if you really knew God as He is, then you would have peace." The writer of the Book of Job honestly believed that in God there were the adequate resources upon which we could draw.

Let a man have some measure of a comfortable balance in his bank, that will hold him in good stead against any emergency, and he seems to have a measure of peace, doesn't he? But oddly enough, we who live in the West have abundant resources, even though they are diminishing, they are still abundant, but we are a restless people, a dissatisfied people, and a people who crave security and peace. In Liberia Winifred and I saw person after person whose only earthly possession was the straw mat upon which he slept at night and the handful of rice that he clutched as he thought of tomorrowand yet you could press us hard to find any happier people in many a moon than they.

Well, let's get back to it if you don't mind. I suggest to you this morning with all the strength that I can command that this craving for peace will not be satisfied until we really know God as He is.

Now we have a problem, let's be honest with ourselves -- some people think they know God, but I must come to you to tell you out of my experience that while they think they may know God, they have wrong notions about God, and they suffer from this. Bless his soul, when he first came to us, I think it was his first year among us -- our present Assistant Pastor, young as he was in the ministry, realized that it would be a very valuable thing to give each member of our Saint Luke graduating high school seniors a gift at that significant time in their lives. I remember walking into his office

when he was wrapping the gifts. He had very carefully chosen a book. The book was authored by J. B. Phillips and bore the title: "Your God Is Too Small." Now young as he was in the ministry, he had already discovered what some of us have known only later on in our ministry, and that is that once a person reaches his 20's and enters his 30's, he is very prone to think that he can get along without God, that he can live his life without any reference to God, or perhaps an infrequent reference. And so our Director of Youth Ministry got this book for them, hoping that they might read it, to encourage them to keep up their relationship with God, to keep their acquaintance with Him fresh, vital.

A mother said to me last night, when we were talking about her son who is now beyond his middle 20's, approaching his 30th birthday within a year or so....she lamented the fact that she hadn't seen him for some time. But this is what she said so poignantly, "What he doesn't realize is this, that time is passing by and all the while he doesn't see us and we don't see him, change may set in. He'll be changing. We'll be changing. And it may well be that whenever he comes back home again we will have to re-establish our relationship, we'll have to get acquainted all over again."

Now happy is the thought that there is always the possibility of re-establishing the relationship and getting acquainted all over again, but in the meantime, knowing that mother as I do, what precious things that young man is denying himself!

Tomorrow night I will not have a pleasant task -- I don't relish it at all, but as the Senior Pastor I'll sit down with one of our task forces (we have several of them appointed this year to take a good hard look at ourselves) -- and the task force that's going to meet tomorrow night is the task force that's dealing with our peripheral members. It's a matter

of fact, we don't deny it, the larger a congregation becomes, the easier it is to get on the periphery. Tomorrow night we'll talk about those people on the periphery of this parish, and on the basis of the study that I've already made, a significant number of them are in the 20- and 30-year brackets. In this period, you see, when they're not paying too much attention about keeping up a vital relationship with God, keeping their acquaintance fresh.

Now I am about to tell you what you may already know -- I think there's one reason why that acquaintanceship is not kept fresh is because they haven't allowed their idea of God to grow as they grow. Now don't get me wrong -- it's a very precious thing to be introduced to God as a kindergartner -- that's a very precious thing. But the concept of God as one who is in the kindergarten may not be the concept of God that will hold us in good stead as one gets older and matures and progresses intellectually.

Now I'll tell you what I mean, bear patiently with me.

- Some youngsters are taught that God has a big book in front of Him, and He records all of the bad things that we do....and some day God will check that book and hold against us all the bad things that have been part of our life, that God is forever going to punish us. I suggest to you that this is a wrong idea of God if you should be at that point. I'm not saying that you shouldn't begin at that point, but I'm saying that you should not stop in your concept of God at that point.

- - Just as I say to you with all the strength that I can command that it's equally wrong to have the kindergartner's concept of God as a grand old man -- the grandfather image, if you please, who pats us on the back, who will get us out of any kind of a scrape -- a superman kind of a concept who lunges down us suddenly and snatches us from harm and danger - - - it is equally wrong to

have this kind of a concept of God, as though life would never deal us a terrible blow.

....now because people labor with either one of these wrong concepts of God, they eventually get themselves in trouble.

As an example -- why go on believing in God if He keeps records - - alright, you have done what's wrong, you know you've committed your sin, and God hasn't punished you yet - - - there was a time perhaps when you thought if you did something terrible, as a child, that God might strike you dead on Tuesday morning at 10:00 o'clock, or at the earliest at 9:00 - - - so he allows himself to believe that he can go on, permitting himself to believe that God doesn't have to be feared, because it hasn't worked out that way. This is a wrong concept of God, and one we will have disabused, you see, if we keep up our acquaintance.

Another concept of God that perhaps we have had is that God is always threatening us, taking away the things that we enjoy, as though God was meant to be a kill-joy. Puritans did a good job of that, you see, then somewhere along the line some people outgrew that. Some people never do. I read about the God-who-came-to-us-in Jesus Christ - - - I think He could laugh ever so heartily. I can picture Him telling a joke, and slapping His thigh as He listened to others tell jokes -- good and wholesome and fully humorous. He went to a wedding -- a happy occasion. He meant life to be enjoyed. But there are some people who never outgrow the notion that if it's thoroughly enjoyable, then it can't be good in the sight of God.

I wouldn't want to embrace a religion that wouldn't allow me to laugh. I knew the first pastor of this congregation when he was a student in seminary -- sure, he was ahead of me, and I can remember how in company with the rest of the students he had to preach in Chapel. And I remember then how Fred Eckert was trying to disabuse the notion that God was a kill-joy, and he told this

little story about the preacher up in New England who had two congregations to serve, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon....

....this was years ago, and his only means of conveyance was riding his horse - - and his horse was lame that Sunday and he couldn't keep his appointment - - - unless - - - he resorted to something that he had never done before, getting a pair of skates and skating down the creek from the one church to the other.

That's exactly what he did.

....and when he arrived at the second point in his charge, the deacons were there, and they saw him skating -- skating on the Sabbath! They called a meeting of the deacons, they took the preacher to task -- how could God smile upon anyone who went skating on the Sabbath?

He tried to tell them exactly why he did it -- it was necessary if he was to keep his appointment to preach the Gospel. He thought he had convinced all of them . . . except one character, stuck out his chin, and his gnarled and curved forefinger straight into the eye of the preacher and said, "But before I cast my vote, there's one thing I need to know -- did ye enjoy the skating?"

.....we need to outgrow the notion that God doesn't want us to be happy.

We need to outgrow the notion that God is a God in a box, that He's to be found only as people come to a certain place, as much as I believe this! But that's not to be meant that He can't be found anywhere else - - we come to find Him here that we may not lose Him beyond these walls!

And this is the way it went: the first man said of a third man to a second man: 'the better you get to know him, the more you will like him.' I suggest to you that it's that way with God, too. Most of us really don't know Him very well. And this is the cause of so much of our trouble. We could have

wrong ideas about Him, just because we've never made it our business to become better acquainted with Him.

Now how can you get to know Him better? One concluding thought: Jesus is that part of God that we can see and know! Said the writer of one of the Epistles: " - - in him (meaning Jesus) all the fullness of God has come to dwell."

.....I beg you, I implore you, keep up your friendship with Jesus Christ. The more you know Him, the greater

He becomes and the more adequate will become your resources - - so that I can now say to you: The peace of God that passeth all understanding keep you

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A SERMON FOR MEMORIAL DAY SUNDAY"

Text. " . . . choose life that you and your descendants
may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His
voice, and cleaving to Him; for that means life
to you and length of days . . ."
(Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

This is not the sermon that I had originally planned to preach to you today. As you know, the sermons to be preached from this Saint Luke pulpit are ordinarily projected about a year in advance. What, however, with the change in calendar dates for legal holidays, suddenly this Memorial Day 1974 is before us. And as I come to this sacred desk this morning, I am made mindful of the fact that some word specifically related to this particular holiday is in order. Hence this sermon which will address an ancient Biblical injunction to the current mood and manner of America.

Oddly enough, let me begin with some commentary on bumper stickers. They are quite the thing these days. In company with many of you, they irritate me. That's a generalization, of course. As you might presume, there are some that constitute an exception. That yellow and black one which has almost become a trade-mark around our parish is easily tolerated. Folks who are members of this congregation usually show a measure of pride when they recognize the bumper sticker that parades before the community our crisis intervention telephone number. It reads like this:

"SOMEBODY CARES -
TEEN HELP - 538-5449"

But by and large, any number of other stickers fail to enthuse me. To the contrary, frequently I find their arrogance obnoxious and their sad

humor offensive.

The other day I heard of another preacher who apparently is a kindred spirit where bumper stickers are concerned. He was annoyed, so I've been told, by a star-spangled one that reads:

"AMERICA: LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT".

And his critical assessment of its sentiment has triggered all kinds of thoughts in my mind. He maintained, my friend reported, that the tersely put slogan borders on dangerous over-simplification. And he is right. What a terrible plight would be ours if no one dared to raise his voice in criticism of the land we cherish? Any correct reading of our past can make the point that we have benefitted by those who raised their concerned voices boldly and honestly. It is foolhardy to think that all who would criticize America have less than love for her, and that only the disciples of Decatur are worthy of citizenship!

As you might suspect, preachers are wont to write their own versions of what they read. And so, I'm told, it's been suggested that "AMERICA, LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT" should be re-written so as to read:

"AMERICA, CHANGE IT OR LOSE IT".

All that follows now has been inspired by the possibility of such re-wording.

Usually when one speaks of change, he means a change to something new. I would suggest this morning -- change to something old!

Let us change back to the notion that we are meant to be a nation dependent, as over against being a nation independent -- independent of God. Once it was so -- at the very beginning. Remember how it was back

in the summer of 1776 at the old Statehouse in Philadelphia? Some thirteen colonies had sent delegates to chart their future course. It was not easily done. In the face of subsequent confusion, the wisest and the oldest among their number was asked to speak. Benjamin Franklin rather reluctantly rose to his feet. Only finally did he speak a few words inspired by a passage from Holy Writ -- Psalm 127. What he said provided the "spiritual foundation" of the United States of America. Here is what he is reported to have said: "I have lived a long time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His will, is it possible for an empire to rise without His notice? We have been assured in the sacred writing that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel!"

As the founding fathers were driven to recognize dependence upon Almighty God, so must we discover anew in our day the need to build upon such foundation.

In the second place let us change back to the nation that's intended to run by rules. John Steinbeck as far back as 1966 put his finger on a sensitive spot when he advised us of a national weakness. He considered it our most serious problem - - both as a people and as individuals. He did not settle easily for it as "immorality," "dishonesty" or "lack of integrity." He reviewed the gamut of our ills: "racial unrest, the emotional crazy quilt that drives our people to the psychiatrists, the fall out, the drop out, the copout insurgency of our children and young people,

the rush to stimulants as well as to hypnotic drugs, the rise of narrow, ugly and vengeful cults of all kinds." He saw all of these as the manifestation of one single cause: our disregard for rules. According to the celebrated author, our fathers lived by the rules - - "rules concerning life, limb and property - - rules defining dishonesty, dishonor, misconduct and crime. The rules were not always obeyed, but they were believed in, and a breaking of them was savagely punished."

America's hope may well lie in our earnest endeavor to appreciate all over again the absolute necessity to place a high value upon rules -- upon principles of decency and honor.

Let us change back to being a nation that can face the future without fear.

Robert Heilbroner in a new book, "An Inquiry Into the Human Prospect," raises the question: "Is there hope for man?" He answers with little, if any, encouragement. Much to the reader's dismay, he even goes so far as to suggest that "the freedom of man must be sacrificed on the altar of the survival of mankind."

Our founding fathers, facing well-nigh insurmountable odds, forged ahead with confidence. Perchance they honestly believed that they had fashioned an instrument of democratic design that would enable them to handle whatever problem would loom upon the horizon. And that is what we must remember. Dr. Daniel Borstin, senior historian of the Smithsonian Institution, is correct when he takes us to task for putting too much stock in solutions as such. It would seem to him that democracy advances the process by which problems are dealt with.

Look at it this way: democracy means people and people mean problems. We will never be free of problems. Let us, therefore, be unafraid since we do have the instrument by which we can deal with the people-problems!

Let us change back to the nation that places a high value upon private morality.

Clare Boothe Luce has observed that "Watergate is the great liberal illusion that you can have public virtue without private morality." Small wonder that some of us acclaim Adlai Stevenson as one of the finest statesmen our generation has produced. When it came to basic morality it seemed to us that he stood head and shoulders above so many. He, too, was trying to say something to us when he referred to a politician of "particularly rancid practices." Of him he lamented: "If he were a bad man, I wouldn't be so afraid of him. But this man has no principles. He doesn't know the difference."

Increasingly it becomes plain to us that "image-making" in our day can become a reckless thing. It has been reported that a certain speech writer for Richard M. Nixon in the 1967 presidential campaign counseled him in a memo: "Potential presidents are measured against an ideal that's a combination of leading man, God, father, hero, pope, king, with maybe a touch of the Furies thrown in." This same person is quoted as having further advised Mr. Nixon: "We have to be very clear on this point: that the response is to the image, not to the man, since 99% of the voters have no contact with the man. It's not what's there that counts, it's what is projected."

All of this, of course, brings us up short since we immediately recognize how dangerous such a thought pattern can be. And not a few of

where the system can be trusted. We can afford to give it time to be tested.

There are some of you who would be very happy if I came to the sacred desk and denounced the President of the United States of America. There would be some of you who would think that I was brave and forthright. You might even think I was very honest by telling you that he's a liar and a crook and guilty of criminal offense. This I cannot do.

Some of you would be very happy if I came to the sacred desk and placed a halo upon his head, and called him God's great gift not only to us but to the entire world, and to portray him for you as one who is absolutely faultless. This I cannot do.

I don't know whether he is telling the truth or not. With all my heart I would wish it so. But as a citizen of this land we must give him time. We must give our Constitution time. We must give our Congress time. We must pay the price to find the truth. In company with some of you I am tired, and that is one reason why Sunday after Sunday you have not come to this place to find me dragging Watergate into this pulpit. But I also know the risk of becoming ostrich-like and pretending that a cancer does not appear upon the body politic.

Which leads me now to suggest to you in the final moments of this sermon: Let us change back to the concept of democracy where each man assumes the responsibility of pulling his own weight. Many of us have a tendency to cop-out - - to suffer despair in the face of the present crisis. But democracy itself is never the solution. It simply provides the process by which things are resolved. Edmund Burke's rebuke remains: 'All that is necessary for the victory of evil is that good men do nothing.' And the

easiest thing for us as so-called good men would be to say that, "I'm tired -- let's walk away from the problem."

In the comic strip Peanuts, Linus tells Charlie Brown, 'I don't like to face problems head on. I think the best way to solve problems is to avoid them. This is a distinct philosophy of mine. No problem is so big or so complicated that it can't be run away from.' Charlie with characteristic naivety asks, 'What if everyone was like you? What if everyone in the whole world suddenly decided to run away from his problems?' Replies Linus, 'Well, at least we'd all be running in the same direction.' And one wonders whether we are not witnessing just that -- a mass retreat from involvement.

Or I would add quickly, involvement for the wrong reasons. And the acid test which God always applies is: Why do you say what you say? Why do you do what you do? Why do you believe what you believe?

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure "

Said a member of this congregation to me, whose judgment I highly regard,

"This could well be the greatest moral crisis that we have ever had to face."

I beg you, my friend, as your Pastor, as a care-taker of the Gospel that's preached from this pulpit --

"AMERICA - CHANGE IT OR LOSE IT"

In this instance, let's go back and take a good hard look at the ways that

have been proven before and the most basic of all is to recognize our dependence upon God, and not our independence of all that's morally pure and true.

The Biblical injunction as laid down in that Book of Deuteronomy makes it perfectly plain. It's a matter of choice, and no man can escape the responsibility of involvement in the decision.

* * *

Sermon preached by The Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.
Saint Luke Lutheran Church
Silver Spring, Maryland
May 26, 1974

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

In the retreat house of Saint Luke Church which is Bethany, there hangs upon the wall in the main room above the sofa a series of full-color photographs. They were taken some two decades ago in the Holy Land. Usually as I look at them my eye fastens particularly upon one of them. It's a large tree, a sycamore in fact, by the bend in the road near the entrance to a town. The town is Jericho.

As I stand there and look at that photograph I have deep thoughts for several reasons. One, I remember the time when I was blessed in being able to be at that very spot. Secondly, as one of the two people who first had laid upon them the sacred obligation to teach the man who is now the other Pastor of Saint Luke Church Bible stories, I recall full well that among the stories taught to him in his childhood none seemed to captivate him more than the story that dealt with the man named Zacchaeus.

There's a third reason why I'm intrigued when I look at that photograph: because I'm constrained to remember something that's a matter of tradition, or a matter of legend. You don't find it itself in Scripture but it's based upon Scripture. Tradition has it that for many a year the townspeople in Jericho saw an old man, bent by the years, shuffling along at a certain hour of the day until he came to a sycamore tree at the edge of town....and there he would stand, and those who were close enough to read the lines on his face discovered that he was in deep thought.

As you might suppose, someone one time made bold to say to him: "Old

man, what gives? What brings you to this spot? Day by day we've noticed that you've come....nary so much a word to anyone. But then, deep in thought, you leave after a while and shuffle down the road -- what gives?"

The old man is supposed to have said, "My name is Zacchaeus, and it was here at this particular spot years ago that my Master first called me by name. It was here that Jesus Christ looked up and said, 'Zacchaeus!' -- and my life has never again been the same since I was called by Jesus Christ. And so I come back here each day, just remembering. It holds me in good stead."

As I come to this sacred desk I suggest to you, blessed indeed is that man who can go back to certain places, either physically so or traveling memory's route, and think about something that happened that continues to hold him in good stead. And for the Christian, perhaps nothing more so than the time, the moment and the experience when he was given to understand that God called him by name, and he responded. A man is known by the things that he can remember that hold him in good stead. Why else should God have given us the blessing of memory?

We have no Confirmation schedule as such in Saint Luke Church today -- ordinarily it happens on Pentecost as you well know. But this year we're in the transitional period. Confirmation which heretofore had taken place in the eighth grade now will take place in the ninth grade, so we're skipping a year. But by prior announcement as you come this Day of Pentecost, the banners hang from the rafters. We're asking not only those young people who were confirmed in the faith here in Saint Luke Church as they approach the altar today to look back and to remember how they were called by name and claimed by Jesus Christ and the promise they made, but for all who are here simply to remember.

Indulge me for a moment . . . I go back 47 years ago, when in an impressionable moment in my life I was confirmed in the Christian faith.

What do I remember?

-- the sermon?....as much as I want you to pay heed to sermons, I have to confess I don't remember the sermon.

-- as much as I believe the service is properly enhanced by the ministry of music, I don't remember what the choir sang.....

....but I remember faces. I remember voices. The hand placed upon my head in blessing on that day of Confirmation the same hand that baptized me in the name of Jesus Christ.....I remember the light in his eyes....the dignified way by which he stood in front of the altar.....I remember the solemnity of his voice. It made me believe it was an awesome moment, when something wonderful was really happening, even though only after a while -- even after the years unfold and the decades pass do I begin to really understand what was happening. Although I was deeply moved at the time.

I remember my parents getting me ready -- not very well versed in the church, not at all familiar with the Luther's Catechism. I remember how they took me to Adams and Young, the only clothing store in town, and got me my new suit. Something wonderful was going to happen, and even this was part of the preparation.

On occasion I go back to that small town. The interior of the church has been changed several times -- redecoration after redecoration has set in, but the walls are the same, and I have deep thoughts when I go back, and remember.

By that same token I've asked your indulgence this morning to suggest that you might go back and remember. Some of you won't have to go back beyond

these walls. Some of you will go back to North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, California.....some of you will go to Denmark, some will go to Norway, some will go to Sweden, some will go to Ireland. Remember now. Hear the voices....see the faces. Re-live for the moment the time when you were nobly intentioned, when you honestly believed that you wanted to be all that God thought you could be, and so you allowed His claim to rest upon you. And you responded.

Both of your Pastors in anticipation of this day, recognizing the fact that we'd have no Confirmation service as such, deemed it right and proper that when the company of the faithful should gather, there should be the re-affirmation of their Confirmation vows. Now in this very precious moment, if you are fortunate enough to come, walk this sacred aisle, approach this altar, within the last eighteen years, have this question put to you:

"Do you love the Lord Jesus -- Do you
promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?"

...remember on this day your response -- while every other person was silent, you alone spoke: "Yes, with my whole heart!"

Maybe you didn't come here. Maybe this Confirmation experience was somewhat different elsewhere. But the essence remains, the ingredients were there. God was calling you by name, and you were responding.

Would you please stand.

I ask you now all over again:

Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise
to serve Him through His Holy Church? If so,
answer, Yes, with my whole heart!

(response by the congregation)

The Father in Heaven, for Jesus' sake, renew and increase
in thee the gift of the Holy Ghost, to thy strengthening
in faith, to thy growth in grace, to thy patience in suffering,
and to the blessed hope of everlasting life. Amen.

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

1974 SAINT LUKE BACCALAUREATE - R.S. (Recorded message)
Sunday, June 9, 1974 - 5:00 p.m. Vespers

Some weeks back when Pastor David and I first discussed this year's Saint Luke Baccalaureate, I learned much to my regret that it was to be scheduled on a day when I would be away. He very graciously encouraged me to follow a noble impulse to record some message that could be shared with you now and in this way.

There are at least three things that I would like to say to you in these two or three minutes available to me.

First, let me tell you that I have gone over the entire roster of your names very slowly and deliberately, one by one, and I would add unashamedly I have gone over the list very prayerfully. In doing so I have recalled again and ever so often some particular relationship that I have had with you during the past years.....

...it may have been when I held you in the crook of my arm and named you for Jesus Christ within the very shadow of this altar where you are now seated...

...it may have been when I stood by your side when you knelt before this same altar and there confirmed your faith in Jesus Christ....

...or it may have been when you and I discussed your Confirmation verse....it may have been when you and I alone talked about God's place in your life as we sat in the quiet of our retreat house which is Bethany.....

...it may have been when you called me one night about the death
of a loved one, and I did my best in God's name to
help you remember the promises of Christ in your time
of sorrow....

So I've gone over your names, one by one, and I've thought very deeply
about the days that have come and gone.

Now the second thing that I want to tell you is that I've gone over
your names one by one and thought of you in this very present moment.
The glow of increasing maturity is upon you, right now. Some of you
have already reached a most remarkable level of spirituality. I marvel
at your depth of understanding of God and His claim upon your life.

The third thing that remains to be said is that as I think of you one
by one, I visualize the future as it unfolds. I haven't the slightest
idea where you will be ten years from now, but I do know that within
the next ten-year period of your life practically every major decision
that you will be called upon to make will determine very largely the nature
and the character of the rest of your life....within the unfolding of the
next ten years.

....most of you will have decided upon your life work, you will
have chosen your life partner, you will have agreed upon
in your own mind what your basic attitude is concerning
yourself....other people....God.

...in most cases, I presume, you will be married and share the
responsibility of parenthood for a child or two....

...this is the way I visualize you in 1984 - -

Happy.....or sad

Satisfied.....or frustrated

Defeated.....or confident

...all of this according to the measure of Christ-likeness that now claims you.

Therefore I say to you: "Study to show yourself approved unto God" That's a bit of Scripture, you know -- Paul's advice to a young man named Timothy. Freely translated, it means: "Never give up on trying to please God" - - - for the only thing that really matters now, and always, is how pleasing your life would be in God's sight.

In this moment now I wish you well and assure you of my continuing thought and prayer in all that lies ahead. God bless you. He needs you, and what is more -- you need Him!

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"IN THE

LIGHT OF COMMON DAY"

A SERMON

Preached on the Occasion
Marking the Fiftieth Anniversary
of the Ordination of
THE REVEREND PASTOR J. RAY HOUSER

Sunday, June 9, 1974

Let's begin where we ought to begin. Why are we here today? Allow me to suggest an answer or two, maybe twice that many and more.

Some of you are here because this is where you belong! Baptized and confirmed in the faith, you keep returning to this particular place. Your life and all that is good about it are linked so very definitely to what takes place within these sacred walls.

Some of you are here because you have been taught respect for the Lord's Day, and have made it a noble habit of your life to mark the path that leads to God's House no matter how far you may be away from home.

Some of you are here because you are part of the family of God, and you can't stay away from those who are one with you, as together we are claimed by the same Heavenly Father.

Some of you are here because you are part of one man's family in particular, and you have come from the west, from the south and from the east as well as from our northern boundary and beyond, to help celebrate a great moment in his life and in the life of the one whom God has blessed as his life partner.

Some are here for all of these reasons. All are here for at least one -- and that is while we come to worship our Heavenly Father and give Him praise through Christ, our Redeemer, we at the same time want to give thanks for one of God's chosen ones -- John Ray Houser. He's celebrating these days the 50th anniversary of his ordination as a Minister of the Gospel.

The temptation is ever present - - to exalt him, to take the measure of his life, to hold it high before you and before God. This I really don't have to do.

Everyone who is here knows the measure of this man, and we know full well that for every one of us who happens to be here we individually represent hundreds upon hundreds of a vast host who cannot be numbered who in one way or another have drawn spiritual strength as his shadow has fallen upon them.

Whether you have known him all his life or met him as recently as a day or a month ago, his basic integrity and decency are readily and immediately transparent. Four weeks ago today he visited the congregation that I am privileged to shepherd. He was our guest preacher at a significant event in the life of a fellow worker, his first parish deaconess. Folks in Saint Luke Church who met him for the first time and in so brief period were heard to say such things as:

"He graced the pulpit with dignity . . . "

"He seems to be so 'down-to-earth' . . . so human . . . "

"He spoke from a pastor's heart . . . "

"He made me feel good . . . "

And people who have known him through early manhood to this very hour can easily nod their heads approvingly, confirming what new acquaintances have just learned.

The Reverend Doctor is in a class all by himself -- if for no other reason than for the fact that in his life he embodies all those good and worthy attributes we would wish for ourselves.

Now there's a question that needs to be asked, and in this sermon today I intend to ask that question and to formulate in your presence an answer -- an answer to which we all can attest.

The question is basic: how do you get a man like Ray Houser? While it may be true that there are others who look back over a half century with little but regret, how come this man can have nothing but sheer joy in the Lord, a deep and abiding measure of gratification -- of years spent in touching people where they are and so introducing the God-in-Christ dimension so that countless numbers of people have kept their faces toward the beckoning hand of the Saviour? How do you get a man such as he who -- no matter when nor how you think of him -- you equate some noble thought with him and instinctively recognize anew the indelible mark of the Master of Men? Let me read for you now lines so aptly written by Oliver Goldsmith who, when he thought of the village parson, the parish priest, in his classic "The Deserted Village," wrote in tribute as becomes the one whom we honor with our presence this day and give God glory for the beauty and the strength of his life:

"At church with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools who came to scoff, remained to pray,
The service past, around the pious man,
With steady zeal, each honest rustic ran:
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown to spare the good man's smile.
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed;
Their welfare pleased him and their cares distrest;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

Today we honor such a man of God whom distinguished writers in glowing language would so acclaim. Again, the question: How did he get this way? How do you account for so rare a soul? for such a good man -- a true man of God?

Well, it's time for the text for this sermon to be introduced. This is a sermon, you know. And I would dishonor this sacred desk, and discredit my calling, if I came before you without the Good Book before me.

The text, for I am constrained to naturally connect all that I would like to say on this occasion with Scripture, constitutes, significantly enough, a pastoral bit of advice to a young minister. It's recorded in I Timothy 4: 16 - -

"Take heed unto thyself, and to the doctrine;
continue in them; for in doing this thou
shalt both save thyself and them that hear
thee."

The text, as seemingly should be true for sermons, lends itself handsomely to three divisions or points.

I. Take heed unto thyself.

Almost a hundred years ago, across the Atlantic, in some little known Scottish town, an elder servant of the Lord admonished a candidate for ordination in this manner: "Perhaps there is no profession which so thoroughly as ours tests and reveals what is in a man -- the stature of his manhood, the mass and quality of his character, the poverty or richness of his mind, the coldness or warmth of his spirituality. These all come out in our work, and become known to our congregation and the community in which we labor. When a man comes into a neighborhood, he is to a large extent an unknown

quantity; and it is very touching to observe the exaggeration with which we are generally looked on at first, people attributing to us a sort of indefinite largeness. But it is marvelous how soon the measure of a man is taken, how he finds his level in the community, and people know whether he is a large or petty man, whether he is a thinker or not, whether he is a deeply religious man or not. The glamour of romance passes off, and everything is seen in the light of common day."

Well, those of us who are here today have seen this man in "the light of common day." We have taken his measure, some for a half-century and more, and he has not been found wanting.

Today is a "big moment" in his life, and it gives cause for reflection.

General Griggs is a character in Lillian Hellman's play, "Autumn Garden." In it he makes this wise observation that we forget at great peril: "At any given moment you are only the sum of your life to them. There are no big moments you can reach unless you have a pile of smaller moments to stand on."

Let me also bring to your attention the young man and woman in Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Carousel." They are day dreaming, and are thinking about how wonderful their life together one day will be. In the lyrics which they sing comes the line " . . . when today is a long time ago." You are right, my friend, the sentiment prompts us to think deeply - - and we ought constantly to remind ourselves that while we cannot know what the outward circumstances of life will be on that distant day yet "as far as character, commitment and philosophy are concerned the future is a continuation of the present."

Surely, on that June day in 1924 John Ray Houser dreamed and thought "when today is a long time ago." Who as a pastor doesn't wish for himself a good and long ministry, full and productive years? And all the realization of increasing fulfillment which our honored friend enjoys today is to be first explained by the fact that he never ceased to give heed to himself!

When and how God saw fit to claim him for this high calling, I do not know. But there was that day or season when it became crystal clear to him that God had chosen him to venture into life "in the highest sense." Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher once wrote: "To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self. And to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of one's self."

John Ray Houser is what he is today because he daily reminded himself of what in God's name he was meant to be!

Walter S. Davidson, writing in The Pulpit (November 1951 issue), expressed in his "The Minister's Morning Prayer of Recommital" what those of us who know him would readily attribute to Ray Houser as the daily thrust of his soul:

"O God, thou art my God;
I belong to Thee; I long for Thee.
All my springs are in Thee.
In Thee is the meaning of my existence.
Toward Thee is the deepest intention of my soul,
The set direction of my life.
To Thee I offer myself anew, and all my powers,
and all the work of this day.
I put myself completely into Thy hands to be
used for Thy purposes.
I would have no other desire than to accomplish
Thy will.
Grant me the help of Thy Holy Spirit that I
may live this day as unto Thee.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Then, you see, having set his soul daily in this manner he moved among his people. Whatever the occasion, event or relationship the stamp of God was there - - unmistakably! But, mark you, it would not have been so had he not first followed the admonition "take heed to thyself . . .!"

The tent-mender-turned-preacher had a way of reminding people of the necessity to nurture themselves before they could be fit to nurture others. In the same spirit as his advice to young Timothy, Paul provided a parting injunction to the elders of the Church at Miletus -- "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock."

James S. Steuart, distinguished Scottish preacher in his "Heralds of God," an excellent practical book on preaching, wrote: "You must believe intensely and with total conviction, if you are to persuade others to believe. Your own spirit must be subjected to the full force and challenge of Christ's ethic, must be energized, supernaturalized, if you are to bring God's help to bear upon the gaping needs of men. The trouble is, as Richard Baxter put it bluntly to the clergy of his day, that 'many a tailor goes in rags, that maketh costly clothes for others.' It is a solemnizing thought for any preacher that what he speaks to men in the name of God is going to be mightily reinforced or mercilessly negated by the quality of life behind it. Chaucer summed it up succinctly when he wrote of his good priest:

'Christes love, and His apostles twelve,
He taught, and first he followed it him-self' . . . "

Said St. Augustine - - "What I live by, I impart."

We're saying the same thing in clear, unvarnished language of Ray Houser today - - he gave what he had, and what he had he got from God!

II "Take heed to the Doctrine"

A man worthy of the high calling must eventually forget himself in the teaching and the message he is intended to communicate. If the man is important, the message is more so. We think gratefully of our friend today because of what he taught us. We cannot separate him from the good news he shared with us.

Whether you realize it or not, there comes to every preacher in every age the temptation to be "popular." "People," it has been said, "want to have everything in them spoken to except their consciences." Or in the blunt words of Bishop Gore, "We do like to lie to ourselves about ourselves." People, thanks to the fact of original sin, don't want to hear the truth about God or themselves. "The way to be successful," maintained the one time gloomy Dean of St. Paul's, "is to give the public exactly what it wants, and about ten per cent more of it than it expects." One just can't preach Christ faithfully without running the risk of "stinging the natural heart of man into opposition and rebellion."

Our honored friend has resisted the temptation to dilute the Gospel because he has consistently immersed himself in the Book of Books and books that interpret the Book of Books. We are set apart as the Ministers of The Word, and we must constantly give heed to what we are called to preach and to teach. Only as we pay attention to what we understand as the basic nature and character of God are we able to bring His truth to bear upon the sinner's predicament. The acid test of any sermon is to be found in the way it brings about an encounter with the Triune God, whether you know it or not -- the question of questions with which Ray Houser dealt with every time he stood up

to speak was simply: how clearly will God come through? John Brokhof had carved into the stone wall by the pulpit of the Lutheran Church of The Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia, these words: "We would see Jesus." Ray Mouser has visualized those same words -- kept them before him constantly -- and we can't possibly think of him apart from the message of Christ's redeeming love. Frankly, I have never thought of him as an "eloquent," "clever," "sensational," or "skilled" homiletician. But I have never known him to be anything less than a Christ-communicator! "I came into town," wrote John Wesley in his Journal, "and offered them Christ." We're here today honoring a man who has done just that Referring to Wesley's entry in his diary, James Steuart observes: "To spend your days doing that -- not just describing Christianity or arguing for a creed, not apologizing for the faith or debating fine shades of religious meaning, but actually offering and giving men Christ -- could any life-work be more thrilling or momentous?" Again let it be said: we are here today honoring a man -- who can give unhesitatingly the right answer to that question.

III "Take heed to them that hear you"

It was said of the founder of the Salvation Army that he wanted to be remembered as a "straight-shooter for souls." And that, I would suggest, is an apt descriptive for the good pastor before us today.

For him the end toward which he always aims is to minister to the needs of those whom God has entrusted into his keeping. And how great and varied are those needs.

Have you ever heard of Saumur? It is an old provincial town in France where the church had a remarkable influence some years back. The local chief

pastor of the ancient Roman Catholic Church of St. Pierre took great pride in the way he went about to enlist men for the priesthood. He used to appeal to them by saying: "There are just four days in anyone's life: birth, confirmation, marriage, death. Would you not like to be the one who is needed on all four of those days?"

John Ray Houser knows, and knows full well, that "there is no romance in the world comparable to that of the Christian ministry." Now with a half century of faithfulness to his credit, ask him if he would do it again and you know the answer!

The answer is a strong, resounding YES. And the reason? He has discovered the joy of being God's man - a reconciling agent, that is.

Karl Heim, writing in "Christian Faith and Science" noted: "If I possess only myself - - - others do not concern me at all; for they are beyond me and beyond the little world which alone belongs to me and which alone is accessible to me. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' I can only be cold toward others, hate them if they harm me, envy them if they are more fortunate than I am, and look on indifferently if things go ill with them. But if God exists, through whom the cell walls between us are rendered ineffective, then the whole relation between you and me is fundamentally altered - - - we can no longer go on living side by side coldly as strangers and without pity. However difficult it may be for us to live peaceably together, as creatures of God we are responsible for one another. We bear one another's burdens."

And now in conclusion. When I called from Silver Spring the other morning to talk with the good pastor, Gertrude hurriedly went to get him.

Where had he been? He was outside drinking in the beauty of all green and growing things - - - greeting a new day - - and feeding the birds! That's what Francis, the saint of Assissi was like, you know. And that's why I salute in this way John Ray Houser with the words of one who in spirit may well turn out to be his "patron saint"

"O Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, union;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;

O Lord, grant that we seek
not to be consoled, but to console,
not to be understood, but to understand;
not to be loved, but to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
In forgetting that we find ourselves,
In pardoning that we are pardoned."

There is a Franciscan story which tells how the saint on one occasion invited a young novice to accompany him on a preaching expedition through the town, and how they passed through one street after another and eventually returned to their starting point, and not a word had been spoken. "But, father," said the probationer, puzzled and disappointed, "I thought we were going to preach?" "We have preached," replied Francis, "we were observed as we walked. They marked us as we went. It was thus that we preached."

Ray Houser can preach with or without words. And the message, Christocentric to the core, comes through loudly and clearly. So I join the great host who give thanks this day for his ministry, and praise God because of it.

Raymond Shaheen.

"THE END OF ALL - - "

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

I am not so sure that I recommend it to you, but let me tell you of something that I am prone to do, wittingly or unwittingly, when I find myself in someone's place of business...

...as an example, if I am dining out, I discover that when I am seated there, before I know it I am re-decorating the place....or I may be saying to myself, if I were in charge of the personnel, how would I go about reprimanding this waiter or waitress for their inefficiency and their incompetence?.....or perchance if I discover that one of them happens to be unusually courteous, how would I go about introducing into my scheme of things, if I were in charge of the personnel, a recognition of this fine trait and characteristic on the part of this person?.....

...or perchance when I drive into a gas station, I look around and see some of the debris that troubles me as I wait and until I get the attention that I'm asking for....or perhaps if the attendant doesn't lift the hood, how I'd go about introducing some kind of motivation, if I were in charge of that station? . . .

What I'm simply saying to you is this: that every now and then I find myself asking such questions - - if I were responsible for this place, how would I go about discharging my obligation?

Which leads me to suggest: that as I stand here this morning, I wonder how many of you there may be who say to yourself as the preacher stands at the sacred desk - - now if I were preaching the sermon, this is the way I'd go about it. Let me reverse the process for the moment.

...suppose you were the preacher - - how would you handle the text that lays its grip upon my soul this morning? How would you preach the sermon? How would you deliver it?

Well, whatever your answers may be, you may be interested in knowing how I've gone about this sermon so far.

...first, I've discovered that the text is irresistible. I cannot ignore it. It lays its claim upon my soul and therefore I feel that I am constrained to preach to you about it....

...then once I recognize the validity of the text, what's the next thing that happens? Well, you ought to know this -- it's always the bowed head in prayer. For no man has a right to deal with Scripture who doesn't deal with it prayerfully. And what is the substance of the prayer? Something of this nature:

...God, I'm not worthy to deal with this text.
I can't possibly understand it to the fullest.
I need Your help. Enable me to so understand
it that perhaps I can make it a bit more understandable to other people. And then, God,
cleanse my soul that by Your grace I may be
made worthy to deal with Your precious truth . . .

Now all of this goes into the making of a sermon. Don't ever forget it.

Having done that, there's another step, if you're interested. And that is the preacher may reach for other translations, for as he reads other translations he gets insights that otherwise he might not have. Let me give you an example -- not the text for this sermon, but in the old King James Version,

the Apostle is talking about what happens when Christ takes over a man's soul.....the old King James Version of 1611 puts it this way:

"If any man be in Christ he becomes a new creation . . "

Bless J. B. Phillips -- with a fresh touch, precise, puts it this way:

"If any man be in Christ he becomes a brand new
person altogether . . . "

You see the advantage of reading more than one translation? And happy indeed is the man, if he's knowledgeable in the original tongues -- he can reach for his Greek, his Aramaic, his Hebrew text.

And now as an example, by your leave, let me read for you at least five different translators who have dealt with this text which is I Peter, the 4th chapter, the 7th verse. The introductions are practically the same, but the concluding remarks invariably have a different twist:

"We are near the end of all things now,
and you should therefore be calm, self-
contained men of prayer . . . "

...another translator:

"The end of all things is now. You must
be self-contained and alert to be able
to pray . . . "

...still another (again I said, the introductions are pretty much the same):

"The end of all things is upon us, so
you must lead an ordered and sober life
to be given to prayer . . . "

...now this is my favorite -- Moffett's translation:

"Now the end of all is near. Steady, then.
Keep cool. Pray . . . "

...William Barclay put it this way:

"Be therefore steady and sober in mind, so
that you will really be able to pray
as you ought . . . "

Now this is the text:

"Now the end of all is near. Steady then.
Keep cool....and pray . . . "

I don't know how many of your acquaintances fall into this category but I've discovered some in recent years who tell me very earnestly that they believe the end is at hand, that this old world of ours has gotten just about as bad as it can get, and God has it up to His neck. Therefore God, then, being tired with us, having given us one chance after another to respond to His redeeming touch and not finding that His efforts are very productive, according to this school of thought that's represented by some of my friends - - God's had it! And He's going to pull down the curtain, even within our lifetime, and the end is at hand. I have some friends who honestly believe this.

And I have my moments when I am convinced as to why they can think the way they think. I don't know where you may be in your thinking along this line, but I do know that when these words for this text were written by the Apostle Peter, that was the thinking of the early church - - they honestly believed the end was at hand.

Now I want you to shift gears for a minute, if you don't mind. But before you shift those gears I want to tell you why I want you to shift the gears. Some of you may have known him....he wasn't a member of this parish, but had lived practically all of his life in metropolitan Washington. He and his wife left last weekend, I think it was, for the Blue Ridge Mountains. Sensitive, they wanted to breathe anew the beauty of God's created world, particularly all green and growing things at this time of the year. So they went back to where they were accustomed to going before, they put in at the lodge.

...and one of the things that they wanted to do on Wednesday, then, was to take the bus that the lodge provided as a courtesy....go as far as they could to the top, and then they'd walk the remaining distance until they could breathe the beauty in to their hearts' content.....

...he didn't take very many steps until he slumped to the ground, without any warning whatsoever. He never recovered. I conducted the services for that family yesterday morning. The end came - - without any warning. Now this is why I am asking you to shift gears, and for heaven's sake, understand me correctly. This is not intended to be a downright morbid thought, but when I stand at this sacred desk I am in duty bound to be realistic.

Now let me suggest to you that suppose by some strange measure of revelation, I don't know how it would happen, but suppose by 12:00 o'clock today you were privy to inside information that come Wednesday of this week your earthly pilgrimage would be completed, that there would be no question about it in your being so informed today. Now let me say it again, I don't know how you'd get this information, but you'd have reason to believe that it would be valid - - - Wednesday of this week the curtain would come down.

Now my question is: You have this afternoon, you have tonight, you have Monday morning, you have Monday afternoon, you have Monday night, you have all day Tuesday, you have Wednesday morning to think about it . . .

...in the light of a truth such as that, how would you behave? Not only what would you think, but what would you do?.....

It's this kind of thing that the Apostle Peter took very seriously, and against this kind of thing gave a bit of advice as it's expressed in this

text.

Now I know that not very many of you think along this line, and I'm also close enough to some of you to know that if you did, you'd probably frighten yourself to death in the face of a prospect as imminent as Wednesday noon. But having said all of that - - now shift your gears and get back to the days of the early church.....it might be a bit more comfortable to think about that!

....so the Apostle Peter says, "Now the end of all is near. Let me give you this advice: steady now! -- keep cool! -- pray!"

I never cease to marvel at how much basic common sense there is in the Scriptures. You'll notice what he's saying first: "In the face of the end that is near, keep yourself under control....you don't panic...you don't lose your senses." He doesn't even say the first thing you do is to pray. He says the first thing that you do is to stabilize yourself.

Now just to show you how much common sense that really is, if you were ever to be found in a gathering of people and somebody yelled "Fire!"and you lost control of yourself, do you think then you would be in a position to handle a fire extinguisher? Or if in the face of an emergency you recognized that the crisis was upon you then and there and you began to panic - - - how do you think you would be able to handle the situation if you've already lost control of yourself?

You don't have to tell me what I hope by this time you recognize as part of my basic philosophy, that prayer is the great resource that God is constantly making available to us, but I suggest to you that some of us even in the time of an emergency don't know how to handle it! Because losing control of ourselves, we really don't appreciate how wonderful prayer

itself is.

Now I'm not belittling the fact that in the time of crisis the first thing that some people will do will be to pray. And when they pray, their prayer may be of this type: "God, where are you?" - - "Come on, God, do something! -- get with it! - - don't delay! - - Take over, God!"

...now believe me and believe me well, that for any number of people in the time of crisis that is the kind of prayer that we offer....

And I suggest to you that there are different levels of prayer. This is not the highest! This is one of the lowest levels of prayer, because it's the prayer of a person who is prone to panic. And if he panics and presses the panic button, he wants somebody else to take over completely. And wittingly or unwittingly he relieves himself of certain responsibilities that only he ought to be able to exercise.

So says the Apostle Peter: "Keep yourself under control -- steady now -- and then you pray, that you might be able to pray aright!" And for the right reasons!

And then the Apostle Peter went on to do something for those people -- you can read about this for yourself in all that he wrote. He said something that I am sure may have startled them, something that may startle you. He said that even though the end is near at hand, you've got to recognize the fact that between now and when the end does come, you may have to suffer! You may have to pay a price! Just because you are a believer, do not permit yourself to think that you're going to be immune from the pain and the price which is life itself.

Now some of us make a big mistake. We permit ourselves to think that just because we believe fervently in Jesus Christ, that we won't have to run

the same type of course that other people have to run through life. That just isn't true! All the problems which constitute life itself come to all of us, whether we are Christian or not.

Among the joys that I experienced last week was to interview several couples who are looking forward to being married, one of them as Christian as any couple could be. And I was thoroughly gratified in everything that we talked about - - their demeanor, their concern. And as they walked away and I closed the door I thought to myself, precious as their faith is, little may they realize all the problems that life may bring to them, and just because they happen to be as Christian as they are, they will not be free from them.

Now says the Apostle Peter, "Keep yourself steady....calm, now - - " (a free translation would be: keep yourself calm, cool and collected -- keep a hold of yourself).....and then you pray. And when you pray as Peter understood it, and you and I should understand it, you're not asking God to give you an escape route. He may on occasion, but that's the low level of praying. The high level of praying is that you ask God to help you to see a situation through! You're not forgetting, are you, that even though Jesus Christ prayed as earnestly as He did in the Garden of Gethsemane, still after Gethsemane came Calvary. Gethsemane did not guarantee Him a route around the price that had to be paid.

We had delightful and profitable dinner conversation the other night when we were guests in a certain home - - - and by the way, quite incidentally, somebody has said that the best thing about a meal sometimes may be not only the food but the conversation. There in the presence of this man who had lived some time, out of his store-house of wisdom he gave us this precious gem: "People make a mistake," he said, "when they allow themselves to think

that the big thing in life is the pursuit of happiness. It isn't. The big thing in life is mastering the art of adjustment!"

...and a free translation of that would be:

learning how to handle what you cannot avoid....

...and from the Christian standpoint, adjusting to the situation by the grace and the power of God in order to handle the situation triumphantly.

Well, my friend, said the Apostle Peter:

"The end of all is near. Steady then.

Keep cool, and pray."

I don't know how near the end is for any of us. I don't pose as a prophet nor as the son of a prophet. But I know that there lies ahead the end, and no man escapes it. And the advice of the Apostle Peter is worthy of our respect. Get ready for it. Keep yourself under control and keep yourself in link with God. For prayer basically is allowing all the resources of Heaven to be made available to you.

...then whenever the end comes, no matter when nor how,
it can come triumphantly! And that's what makes living
worthwhile.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Let's begin where we ought to begin. Just why are we here today, and now? Some of you are here undoubtedly because this is where you belong. This is where you were baptized in the Christian faith, this is where you were named for Jesus Christ. And as has been your holy custom, you keep returning to this holy place.

...some of you are here because this is the Lord's Day, and even though you may not be a member of this particular congregation, you have been taught respect for the Day of the Lord, and no matter where you may be you always find it possible to mark the path that leads to God's House, wherever it may be....

...some of you are here because basically you understand yourselves as members together in the Family of God, and members of a family ought to be drawn to each other, and particularly when they find themselves in the House of their Father.....

Now some of you happen to be here because you are members of one man's family in particular. You may happen to be his grandmother....you may happen to be his father or his mother....you may happen to be his wife. You are here because this is a great moment in the life of one who is very precious to you.

Some of you can't possibly think of a day or a night that has come and gone without your asking God to bless him, to watch over him, that he might grow, mark you, in Christian grace and stature.

Now all of us are here for any one of these reasons . . . every single one of us here for one reason or another in particular. Let it be clearly stated, this is a great moment in the life of Charles Mercer Zimmerman.

But as Lillian Hellman has one of her characters in "Autumn Gardens" say, "There really is no such thing as a great moment in any man's life per se." For even though we may label it as such, a great moment properly understood is simply the accumulation of all the wonderful moments that have preceded it. So that this special moment in the life of Charles Mercer Zimmerman, great as we may call it, has to be seen against the background of all those other wonderful precious moments that have gone before.

- - there was that precious moment when he was named for Jesus Christ -- introduced into the Family of God. This was no small moment in his life.....

- - nor was it a small moment in his life when Dorothy, Sunday after Sunday, who readied him for Sunday School and you brought him with you, and you allowed others to nurture his soul in your behalf, in behalf of yourself and of his father....that was no simple moment when Sunday School teacher after Sunday School teacher here in this place taught him respect for the fundamental truths of God.....

- - that was no small moment when Charles Mercer Zimmerman sat with people such as Rodney Hader, and Rodney Hader had thrust upon him the sacred obligation of teaching him part of Luther's Catechism....

- - that was no small moment in his life when he knelt before this very altar and publicly declared his faith in Jesus Christ...

...and when the question was put to him: "Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?"

- - - without any hesitation, with the conviction far greater than his years would allow, he answered, "Yes, with my whole heart!"

- - it was no small moment in his life when in company with a group of others of his peers we met in that other piece of holy ground which is Saint Luke Church, Bethany, our retreat house. And as we sat there, at a very impressionable age, it was made plain to him that God still needs men, and that God has His own way of making a claim upon them, and that God can use them in a very special way as pastors. . . . he in company with one other honestly believed, as a result of that encounter at Bethany, that God had use for them.....

These were no small moments.

And this moment today has to be seen against that moment when the decision was made that he would go to college, he'd head for a theological seminary where seed would be sown that would germinate and bring forth fruit, the first garnering of which we are privileged to glean today. The moment of Ordination, special and wonderful as it is, must be properly seen as the accumulation of all those wonderful moments that have preceded it.

As I stand at this sacred desk, as is my custom I must share with you a word of Scripture. I can't possibly come to this sacred desk without having the Good Book in front of me. I would not be faithful to my high

calling and I would bring disrespect to this occasion if I were to preach unless all that I could say to you could be rooted and grounded in the Scriptures, particularly as we are mindful of the fact that we are setting aside one who is to be a Minister of the Word! And now, Charles, this text that's been carefully chosen for this occasion, constitutes the words of advice given by an older man to a younger man who felt the claim of God upon his soul. The text is recorded in First Timothy, the fourth chapter, the sixteenth verse:

"Take heed unto yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both serve thyself and them that hear thee."

The text lends itself beautifully to a sermon. For you may have been taught, Charles, as others before you have been taught, that if at all possible a sermon to be well balanced should have three points or three divisions. And the text lends itself beautifully to that kind of thing.

Point Number One: "Take heed unto yourself . . ." - - a free translation would be this: Pay attention, Charles, to Charles Zimmerman. Take yourself seriously. Recognize always your identity. Says the older man to the younger man about to be set aside for the Ministry: "Take heed to yourself."

...you won't be worth much to your congregation, Charles, if you don't keep yourself spiritually fit. You must always remember who you are. There ought not to be any such thing as an identity crisis in your life. As long as you live you ought to keep saying to yourself, "I am Charles Zimmerman, a child of God, called by God to be a servant in His Holy Church. I am meant to be a pastor"

As Martin Luther kept reminding himself through one crisis after another through which he had to go, the only thing that enabled him to keep his sanity: "I am baptized, I am God's child." - - so as it could be as the years unfold for you, with one blessed chapter being written after another, with one difficult chapter being written after another: Pay heed to yourself - - don't ever forget who you are.

In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," there is that very sad moment, the little family circle gathers around the grave, and they lay him to rest. And one of his sons laments soulfully, "What a pity. He never really knew who he was."

I am numbered among those who honestly believe, Charles, that a pastor is a special person. Not that he allows himself vain qualities, God forbid, but special in the sense that he's called by God for special purposes. These thirty-four years that God has allowed me to spend in the ministry have allowed me to define for myself what I think a pastor is meant to be. And as I remember it I gather strength. And what is this simple definition?

A Pastor is God's particular person, for a particular purpose, to a particular people, in a particular place.

....you are meant to be their shepherd, in a sense that no other member of that Body of Christ has been called. This is what makes you special: because of the purpose that claims you as you are sent to a particular people.

In Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Carousel" - - remember there are the two lovers. And as lovers are wont to do, they think and they dream of the days yet to come. They take that long, long look, and there's a line in the

lyric from "Carousel" that goes like this: "When today is a long time ago."

You have a right, in this precious moment, to take a long look to the unfolding of the years - - - to Pastor Charles Mercer Zimmerman --

-- ordained - 10 years

...20 years

...by the grace of God, 30 years

...by the grace of God, 50 years.....

...and as those years pass God grant that some day someone might say of you, as Oliver Goldsmith said of the village priest, the village parson, in "The Deserted Village" - -

"At church with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools who came to scoff, remained to pray,
The service past, around the pious man,
With steady zeal, each honest rustic ran:
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown to spare the good man's smile.
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed;
Their welfare pleased him and their cares distrest;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

Take heed to thyself, Charles Zimmerman, and these are the words that some day by the grace of God, someone shall say of you. Now is the time to get ready. Now is the time to walk in that direction. The Pastor that you are meant to be you are now in this moment becoming. Take heed to thyself. You cannot give what you have not received.

The Second Point of the text: Take heed to the doctrine.

You are ordained a Minister of the Lutheran Church, and in the Lutheran

Church we are happy to say that any man set aside for the Gospel Ministry must root and ground himself in the Scriptures! Don't allow a single day to pass without reading the Scriptures for your own edification -- not simply for the preparing of a sermon. As you grow spiritually, so your people will grow spiritually. I have no ideas what winds of doctrine will come and go before your ministry will be ended. I look back over these three-and-a-half decades that God has allowed me and I have my moments when I smile when I think of the changes that have come and gone - - - and how the man who has been committed to preaching the plain unvarnished truth of God, the simple doctrine of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, has been the only preacher of the Word who has continued to feed the souls of his people and proven himself the good pastor.

Charles, you have heard me say it before....John Wesley, said one historian, did more for his generation than any other person who lived, and oddly enough, he was a preacher. He traveled up and down England. They say he had an old white horse. He got up at five o'clock in the morning, he preached to the men as they went down into the mines....he preached to the people as they gathered in the village square at midday....he preached to the farmers coming back from their fields at night. He kept a diary. Like as not, they tell me that in each entry that he made he said where he had been, what had happened.....and like as not, the final sentence as he closed that chapter for the day: "I gave them Christ! - - I gave them Christ!" Let this be the chapter in your life day after day as you minister to people.

Hard by the pulpit in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia, John Brokhof, the able Pastor of that congregation who saw its walls constructed, deliberately chose these words to be carved into

that stone: "SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS" - - - and so give heed to the doctrine, that wherever you may go, whatever you may do, Jesus Christ may come through. You are meant to be a communicator of Jesus Christ, that's what you're meant to be.

The final part of the text:

"Give heed to yourself and to the doctrine,
and by doing so you will save both them you
teach and yourself."

The final part of the sermon of course is this: You must never take your mind off of the people to whom God sent you to minister. The founder of the Salvation Army once referred to himself as a "Straight-shooter For Souls." He looked upon every person that he met as a candidate for Heaven. He looked upon every person that he met as someone for whom God came through Jesus Christ to suffer, and to live triumphantly. Take heed to this, Charles. Never write any man off! There is such a thing as the grace of God, and there is such a thing as the power of conversion. And you're meant to be God's agent, to help bring this about. Give heed to them to whom you will minister.

Said John Henry Cardinal Newman:

"God has created me to do Him
some definite service;
He has committed some work to me
which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission - -
I am a link in a chain,
A bond of connection between persons.
He has not created me for naught.
I shall do good. I shall do His work . . . "

And this you will do, Charles, as you preach and as you live among your people.

In my study here, not far from this place where I am standing, the other

of our two sons gave his father an interpretation of Saint Francis of Assissi which I cherish. Timothy and Christopher's Uncle Jon did this original interpretation of Saint Francis.

He ought to have a claim upon your soul because Francis had a passion for people. He gathered around him some people that he taught how to preach. And one day, Charles, a neophyte came to him. He said, "Please -- please, Father in the Faith, take me to the village today and let me see how you preach."....he nagged him, he kept after him. And then finally one day the blessed Saint Francis said, "Today we shall go to the village." ...and the neophyte was all excited because that was the day -- at close range he'd see the master preach.

...they got up early in the morning, they went to the village..
...they helped an old lady across the street....the comforted a woman who had lost her son that day....they spent the whole day just talking to people, being kind and being gracious.

...and when they came home, the neophyte lamented and said, "But Master, you said today we would preach, and you said nary so much as a word!" Francis said, "But don't you understand -- as we gave these people a simple chapter in our life this day, and walked among them - - as we walked we preached!"

Charles, a good pastor preaches with words.

A better pastor masters the art of also preaching without words.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO FLEE FROM FEAR"

(I John 4:18)

WE MAKE so little time to do this sort of thing, O God, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. Now that we're about to do it, we need the help of Your Holy Spirit. We're grateful for it. Amen.

I have never known a man who wasn't afraid of something or someone. Sooner or later, no matter how bold a face he was able to give, fear had a way of taking a crippling effect upon him.

They tell me that it's natural to be afraid. They tell me that every child that's born into this world is born with at least two basic fears: the fear of a loud noise and the fear of a fall. And that can be one reason why when you hold a child, you may permit yourself to think that he is responding securely to the fact that you are supporting him close to your own body.

Now if we're born with two basic fears, goodness knows how many we acquire as we grow older. Let me suggest that at the very beginning we recognize the fact that fear can serve a useful purpose, and maybe that's part of our problem. There is some good that does come from fear....

...some people ought to have the fear of God stamped down
deep in and through their hearts

...some people ought to have the fear that is respect for
authority branded upon them

...some people ought to have fear made very clear to them that

you can't tamper with the basic rules and laws of
God and the basic principles of morality without
being burned.....

Fear also serves a useful purpose for the growing child. Don't we teach him, and teach him well, that he should look to the right and to the left very carefully before crossing the street, lest a car come quickly and run him down? Don't some of us take the necessary precaution, once we've stepped upon a nail, just because we are afraid of infection? There is a purpose to be served by being afraid. But I'm not going to talk to you about that aspect of fear this morning. I want to talk to you about the aspect of fear that cripples us.

Let me suggest to you that some people are afraid of the past. In the years gone by they have allowed themselves some measure of indiscretion -- they rue the day that they ever allowed certain people to have a kind of an influence on them, to take them certain places and to do certain things, which to the end of their days now they'll be forever ashamed that they were ever a party to that kind of a thing. There are some people who look back over the past and they're haunted by the fear of its catching up with them, that perhaps some day someone will reveal to others the knowledge to which he has been privy....and he's always afraid that his past will catch up with him....

...not only is he afraid of it himself, but he's afraid of the fact that there are some people who will never have done with his past, who in their own way are always reminding him of it, who have never known what a wonderful thing it is to be blinded to some of the things for which a man remains ashamed to the very day that he dies.

There are some people who are afraid of the present moment. The past is over, and maybe by the grace of God they've learned how to handle it, but the present moment? - - it's so unavoidable, it's so inescapable. It's today, you see, that you have to keep that appointment at 10:00 o'clock with the man that you dread. He's fierce competition for you. He's always a threat. But you can't escape it - - you have to face him today. It's today, you see, with time running out on you, when the decision has to be made in regard to this problem or in regard to this matter, and you can't put it off any longer. And there are some people who are dreadfully afraid of the pressing demand of the present moment....

...yesterday is over, and tomorrow hasn't yet come....but
how can I handle what I can't escape right now? It can be
so very crippling.

Then there are those who are afraid of the future. They think of what has happened to other people before they have ended their years, their earthly pilgrimage. They know how physical and mental deterioration has taken its toll. And they have their moments when they think of their years yet to come and they say, and it could happen to me - - where will I live? - - who will take care of me? - - how can I manage on a reduced income? - - how can I manage when I no longer have the stimulation and the challenge of the work that now claims me?

.....there are people who are afraid of the future.

Now this sermon has a text -- I'm not forgetting that, and it's the basic Scripture that justifies everything that I'm trying to share with you. There was a grand and good man who wrote a letter to some Christians when the Church was very young. His name was John. In fact, he wrote three letters.

In the first letter that he wrote -- you can read it for yourself, the 4th chapter, the 18th verse, he says something about people being tormented by fear, and then he says:

"But perfect love casts out fear . . ."

Now you daren't forget to whom he was writing, and the background against which he was writing. He was writing to some people who were quite afraid to die, because they were given to understand in that day that the end of the world was near at hand. They were always living out their days within the shadow of the Great White Throne.....and he discovered, Christians though they were, that they were afraid to die. And so he wrote them this Letter, and he kept hammering away that they shouldn't even be afraid of death. He'd help them to get ready for it.

Now I ought to tell you that there is something that troubles me and I really don't know what to make of it. I'll be grateful for whatever insight you might be able to share with me. But it's only been about three times in recent years that as your Pastor I have been called upon by any member of this congregation to help a person get ready to die.

There was a time in the church when the pastor spent a great deal of his time ministering to the dying, and to help them get ready for the moment of death.

...oh, I have an idea why this may be true today. One is, thanks to medical science, we have any number of drugs that have a sedative effect. And so as a person may be terminal and near the end, he's numbed into dying. He's no longer alert. He's not aware of the fact that it is imminent.....

And so therefore there's no need, you see, there's no cause, to have the preacher loom on the horizon and to have a person get ready.

I could settle for that one, because this I can understand.

But there's a second reason that occurs to me that I can't ignore. And this troubles me a great deal. There are some people who tell me that ours is a generation where people no longer think in terms of God as once they did, and so they're not afraid of the Judgment. They're not only not afraid of the fact that death could come, but they're not afraid of what may happen after death. A grand and good man of our day has said that a sad commentary upon our generation is this: that we are a people for whom Hell has no torment, and Heaven has no invitation. We just don't think of going to Hell and being punished. And we're not excited about going to Heaven and being blissfully happy. So who's afraid to die?

Some of us were brought up, and we're not ashamed to tell you, by the tradition that led us to believe that God, seated in Heaven, had in front of Him a great book. And in that book He kept a record of all the things that we said and did, the good things and the bad things. And then there would be a time of Judgment, and we'd be encountered by God, and we'd either pass or we wouldn't pass. I don't know that people do much thinking in that direction any longer.

And maybe I have to say to you that maybe it could be that people aren't so much afraid of dying as they are afraid of living, because of what I've already indicated to you as the future may unfold for a person, all the things that he may have to meet in this present world are enough to almost scare any man to death.

"Now," says this grand and good man who wrote
the Letter - - "I want to tell you something.
Perfect love casts out fear."

Now what did he mean by that?

He simply meant, it seems to me, that if you understand the basic nature and character of God, the crippling blow which is fear can be handled.

Now what is God like? Don't you remember the three-worded definition that we had for God as youngsters? - - God is love. And I want to give you my definition of love: To love is to meet the need of another person.

...and you never really understand what God is like until you understand Him as being loving, and to prove it He gave us Jesus Christ, because in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

When our Blessed Lord was here on ~~the~~ earth He called together a group of His disciples once and He realized that they were going to be fearful of what would happen to them after He was gone. And then He said to them quietly and calmly the words to which you turn ever so often in the New Testament -- it's the one passage in your Bible that you especially cherish:

"Let not your heart be troubled - - "

" - - don't be afraid!" - - that's God speaking to us!

Now it's one thing to tell a person not to be afraid. It's another thing to be able to tell him why he need not fear. And then Jesus went on to do that. And as He spoke to them He gave them to understand that His basic nature and character never changes - - God is never less than love! And that's why some of us look back over our earlier days when we had done something wrong, and we were afraid to face our father. But the only ameliorating benefit that came from it, despite the punishment that we were not spared, was the fact that we knew that he loved us. So I say to you as I say to myself, so you're afraid because of your sin, and you're afraid your sin will find you out? I have good news for you, friend - - the God who deals with us as sinners is a loving,

gracious Heavenly Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ also said, "I will never leave you! - - I will never forsake you! - - I will always be with you!" And some of us are absolutely unafraid as long as we can have the assurance that we can be found in the presence of someone who is stronger than we are. A crippling blow comes to any man when suddenly he finds himself bereft of the strength that comes through companionship. And if you and I can understand that on a human level, think how much more wonderful it is to be able to appreciate, then, the fact that God says to us, "There will never be a situation in which I will not be found -- I'll always be with you."

William James, bless his soul, used to tell the students up at Harvard, as he would end some of his lectures, that he wanted them to think in terms of a faith-ladder . . . you go from one rung to another up the ladder.

...you would begin with something that seemed reasonable to you, and because it seemed reasonable to you you would trust it, then you would go up the next rung, to something that you'd think in the mind of God could exist....and then you permit yourself to believe that it did exist, and then you'd order your actions accordingly....
...and that made all the difference in the world.

Now Jesus Christ is saying to us, "Believe these things - - accept these things! I will never leave you! - - "

" - - don't be afraid - - I'll be within reach!"

" - - My peace I will give to you -- not the ~~XXXXXX~~

torture of an angry God, but the peace of the pardoned - - "

" . . And then don't be afraid when the end comes. You won't be left out.

There is such a thing as Heaven, and I'll have a place for you."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

AMERICA - AND GOD'S MERCY

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

In the time that remains for the sermon let me be brief, direct, precise. I am fully aware of the fact that this the Sunday that introduces the week in which there is a particular day in which we remember all over again the bent of this nation. Now let me say at once -- you have heard aright, my friend....the hymns that have been chosen especially for this day are all hymns that have to deal with our nation. You have heard aright.

The second thing, you have seen aright.....close by the reading desk, the lectern, here in Saint Luke Church is a flag which is the symbol of our loyalty to a particular nation, the United States of America.

Now I am fully aware that there are some congregations where this would not happen. Strange as it may seem to you, I know some men who wear the cloth who would never so much as allow the flag of a particular nation to be in their chancel, for they are committed to the basic concept, as they see it, that the Christian church has no loyalty to any particular country, and that when Christians gather together, they must recognize the fact that they are citizens primarily of the Kingdom of God. And by that same token, there would be no singing of patriotic hymns.

Now we do not subscribe to that notion as such, as you fully know. Here in Saint Luke Church the flag is visible Sunday by Sunday. Here in Saint Luke Church on occasion we do sing hymns that are particularly related

to our nation. And every day, weather permitting, on the church lawn there flies, as one of the two flags, the symbol of our loyalty to our nation.

Now having said that, let me read for you the text, the text that has prompted all that I'm about to say to you. The words of Psalm #67 begin in this fashion:

"God be merciful unto us and bless
us, and cause your face to shine
upon us . . . "

...the writer of that Psalm honestly believed that he had a right to ask God to pay attention to his people, that he had a right to say, "God, look in our direction!" - - - that he had a right to say, "God, of all the people on the face of the earth, don't forget us, and give us a favorable glance."

Now I raise the question in your presence, is it a valid thing that we in America could ask God to bless us? Dare we, as one nation among many, turn to God and say, "God, give us a favorable glance"? - - "God, give us some measure of Your attention!" - - ? My answer without any hesitation is an absolute YES. Just as I have told you on occasion that you have a right to turn to God and to talk to God about yourselves, every individual has a right to turn to God and say, "God, I have certain needs - - God, I am Your child! - - - God, I'm asking for Your blessing! - - - God, I'm asking for Your strength, I'm asking for Your favor."

....I wouldn't give much for a man in his prayer life if he refused to ask God to pay some attention to him. Because if we are to be God's vessels, if we are to be God's instruments, then we must receive from God what we need to do God's work and to perform His will.

Now I'm not unmindful of the fact that here in the United States of America, we on occasion think in these terms. For have we not written into our Salute to the Flag " . . a nation under God . . " - - ?

- - have we not imprinted in the coin of the realm:

"In God We Trust" - - ?

- - do we not take from the public treasury funds by

which to pay a man who guarantees that every time the House of Representatives is in session, the very first thing that's done is to turn the direction of that House of Representatives toward God - - - ?

...and by the same token we dip into the public treasury and pay a man who guarantees that every time the United States Senate is in session, they should turn their thoughts in the direction of God - - ?

- - is it not so that every time we inaugurate a man as President of the United States of America, that he takes his oath solemnly by placing his hand upon the Good Book - - - ?

Do I have to remind you that when this nation was born, there were those who said, there can be no hope for us and we can have no foundation unless we recognize ourselves as a people under God? And so the charter for this nation of ours breathes of the essence of the eternal dimension, the very fact of God.

Now again the question has to be raised: Dare we allow ourselves this turning to God and asking God to bless us? I'm wondering if you would be

kind enough to indulge me personally for a moment.

...I happen to be the son of an immigrant father. I remember how he used to talk to me and tell me of his dream that possessed his youthful spirit to come to America....barely eighteen years of age, he gathered funds together from friends and relatives, packed his bags - - three-and-a-half-weeks on the steamer until he arrived at Ellis Island.....never to see his loved ones again, never to return to his native land. There was that obsession -- America as no other nation on the face of the earth beckoned him. It was America that opened her doors to him, whose Lady Liberty, with a kind of outstretched hand, said, "Come! -- wretched and poor as you may be -- come!"

...he used to tell me of his debt of gratitude to those here who gave him a chance, so that the first \$200 that he earned he sent back to his family and his friends.....

...he used to walk from one village to another -- I've told you this before, haven't I? - - with a sachel in one hand, a sachel in the other, balanced together by that leather strap around his shoulder, he'd go from village to village.

....there were those who befriended him, who taught him to read, who taught him to write. And then how deeply moved he would recite for me that event-of-event when he was declared a citizen of the United States of America!

...I know what this land has meant to people like him, and to others. And that's why I can say to you without any hesitation - - "God be merciful to us - - God, bless us, that we can be like this to other people."

What a salutary exercise it could be right now if I interrupted this sermon and asked all those present within these walls to stand who are the sons of immigrants and the daughters of immigrants, by the first or second generation - - what shuffling there would be, what evidence there would be as we would stand and recognize the debt that we owe to a nation that said, "God ahead and come - - "...and then to give what we've given.

In God's plan for my life you know that I have had the good fortune to travel around the world, and then to receive one special assignment after another that's taken me into a variety of climes and cultures. With my own eyes I have seen what the outstretched hand of America has done for other people. I've seen the land that's been reclaimed. I have seen the schools that have been built. I have seen the hospitals that have been established. I have seen the hungry who have been fed who otherwise would have starved to death. I've seen the ill-clad who have been made warm by your clothing who otherwise would have frozen to death. I have seen the Christians in America who have gone to take the Gospel of hope and to give a redeeming touch to other people because they happen to live in a land that ~~xxxx~~ says, "You are welcome to go in God's name - - and we will make it easy for you to go in God's name."

This is not true of other nations.

This is not true of the second most powerful nation in the world today. And so I say to you, we have a perfect right to rise and say, "God, be merciful to us and bless us" -- because God exercises a kind of economy. If I know the mind of God at all, I know that God works in this way, "Alright, you can have it, but I give it to you, only I ask that you use it to help other people." So therefore we do have a right -- just as the Jew of old

would pray the Psalm #67 -- "Go ahead, God, bless us, that we may be a blessing to others" -- we have a right to turn prayerfully to God, and I say to you that just as you and I don't do enough praying for our own selves, that we might be made fit and humble in the sight of God, just so I suggest to you, we haven't done enough praying for our own nation. Maybe had we prayed more earnestly for America she might not find herself with all that mess in the political arena today, maybe some of our leaders could have been more than what they've turned out to be, if we had prayed for them. Let this sermon at this point be a measure of rebuke to all of us - - "God, be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." "Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee - - - then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us . . . "

-- to what end?

" . . . that all the ends of the earth shall
fear Him . . . "

What does that mean? -- respect Him as the giver of all good things being channeled through us.

I carry around in my wallet something that was written for me by one of the three people in this world that I happen to love most. He had read it in a book. He says, "In every man's life there ought to be two great moments: the moment when he discovers that he was actually born into the world, and the second moment when he discovers why he was born, to what end." The parallel remains for this nation. America needs to discover all over again that she

was created with the smile of God upon her. Read again the charter by which we were founded, and discover all over again the eternal dimension, the divine ingredient....

...and then secondly, America must learn to discover all over again the purpose that she was meant to serve. Maybe we'll think about it on July 4.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

SERMON

...based on Mark 4:35-41

and delivered at the Communion
Service, evening of July 9, 1974
LCA CONVENTION IN BALTIMORE.

Text: "He said to them, Why are ye fearful?
How is it that you have no faith?"

Mark 4:40

Let us begin with the point at which every sermon should continue, and one may also add quickly, conclude: with, of all things, a text! And the text for tonight is from the second lesson that was read: the good news as put down for us by that man named Mark - - chapter four, verse 40 - - - "Why are ye fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

That's our Blessed Lord for you. At it again magnificently. Giving us, that's what He's doing, a case study in two questions: where the second of the two questions constitutes an answer to the first!

And whether you should deal with the words of the text in context -- or not -- I suggest to you they can stand alone exceptionally well. While they come to us out of a precise situation, the predicament of man as here represented is not uncommon.

Specifically, as you may recall, it's the wonderful story in the Gospel according to the earliest of recorders where Jesus comes to the rescue of panic-stricken disciples. He calmed the sea -- and them -- when a storm had overtaken them. Caught in a tight spot, they were bewildered and bereft. Much to His disappointment, they were not equal to the event. So, as He was wont to do, quietly and calmly, He took over, resolved the

difficulty before their very eyes. Having done that, He went on to make the most of the opportunity their distress brought to Him. He used it to deal with the underlying cause of their panic.

Now you are impressed, aren't you, by the way He masterfully handled it. In so subtle fashion, He moved them immediately beyond their situation - - - to what was vastly more important - - their predicament. And all of this He did superbly by asking those two questions - - - where the second of the two implies the answer to the first. He just wasn't about to settle for anything less than a realistic appraisal of the incident. So all in one breath -- questions asked -- answer given: "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" In these words and with this technique God's Great Galilean comes to grips with a central problem common to us all: our fearfulness. In fact none other than that astute observer of the human scene, G. Bernard Shaw, maintained: "There is one universal passion: it is fear."

On the other hand permit me to hasten that our Blessed Lord referred not so much to fear as to fearfulness. There is a slight and delicate line that can be drawn. He put it wisely who said: "Fear is a biological instinct planted in our being to protect us from needless risks and to promote our efficiency. Fearfulness, however, is quite a different matter. It is fear driven to excess, gone wild and rank, out of hand and beyond control." And I myself would most certainly add: without any reliance upon the reliability of God!

Allow me now to say something quite parenthetical. Whatever a man is at ten o'clock in the morning, or say at two o'clock in the afternoon, he is moreso at eleven o'clock at night. One assumes, you see, that come the approach of midnight, most of us will have crawled into our beds. Left alone at that point in time, either fear or faith takes over!

H. G. Wells, bless his soul, reflected in this vein and lamented:

"As night goes round the earth, always there are
hundreds of thousands of people who should be
sleeping, lying awake in their beds, fearing a
competition, dreading lest they cannot make good,
ill of some illness they cannot comprehend, dis-
tressed by some irrational quarrel, maddened by
some thwarted instinct or some suppressed and
thwarted desire."

So! Man is a fearful creature. Seemingly there is no end to the grouping of our fears. Victor Hugo had his own perceptive way of classifying the fears that so easily beset man. Do you remember how he handled them so expertly in his trilogy? First he thought of man's fear of Nature, and he wrote "Toilers of The Sea." Then he set himself to thinking of man's fear of society and wrote "Les Miserables." And you're right! He naturally went on to deal with man's fear of God and wrote "Notre Dame de Paris."

Personally speaking as any pastor of a decade or so of experience can do, and from the vantage point of one who has been privileged to listen in on human hearts, there is the trilogy of fears we can relate.

There is the fear of the past. Some there are who remain haunted by a day that was. It had its moment of indiscretion or its season of folly and stupidity. If only they could be free of the sordid memory that continues to sear as it cripples. And what is more, if only others could have done with it! There are folks, you see, who can never set another man free from his past. They deliberately imprison him in it. Forshame, twice shame upon them since from the Christian perspective: every sinner has a future and every saint has a past!

There are those who fear the present. The past is over. The future has not yet come. But at hand is the unavoidable present with its inescapable pressure. There is the decision that must be made today - - it can no longer be delayed - - the choice must be made now. There is the appointment that must be kept today. There is the adversary who must be faced today. It's all locked into the agenda of life which is called TODAY.

There are those who fear the future. So far so good, they say. Today isn't so bad and we did survive yesterday. But then think of all those terrible things that could happen: like filling out that medical form. One enjoys a measure of limited satisfaction in chalking off all the ailments and conditions he's escaped so far - - only to be sobered by the notion that what he has not had -- he could get! The future gives pause for reflection on so many fronts: Uncle Joe did divorce his wife after 34 years of an apparently good marriage: will Frank leave me, asks Nellie,

once the children are on their own and his niche in life is secure? The neighbor down the street had a business partner he had known from school days, yet after 25 years of continued company growth and expansion he defrauded him and left him in ruin. Could that - - what if - - that should happen to me fearfully ponders Charlie. Aunt Sally, who never had an ache or pain, one day discovered a lump on her breast. The surgeon, upon examination of other vital organs, gave her three to four months to live. He was correct - - it was 14 months to the day.

Whether we think in terms of the past, present or future; Nature, Man or God; things specific or things general, our fearfulness cripples us. Whatever else there is to say - - it is the great crippler!

[It has been maintained that FEAR is man's greatest adversary. According to an ancient legend, a man driving one day to Constantinople was stopped by an old woman who asked him for a ride. He took her up beside him and, as they drove along, he looked at her and became frightened and asked "Who are you?"

The old woman replied: "I am the dreaded cholera."

Thereupon the peasant ordered the old woman to get down and walk; but she persuaded him to take her along upon her promise that she would not kill more than five people in Constantinople. As a pledge of her promise, she handed him a dagger, saying to him that it was the only weapon with which she could be killed. Then she added: "I shall meet you in two days. If I break my promise, you may stab me."

In Constantinople 120 people died of the cholera. The enraged man who had driven her to the city, and to whom she had given the dagger as a pledge that she would not kill more than five, went out to look for the old woman, and meeting her raised his dagger to kill her. But she stopped him saying, "I have kept my agreement. I killed only five. Fear killed the others."

(The legend is a true parable of life. Where disease kills its thousands, fear kills its tens of thousands. The greatest miseries of mankind come from the dread of trouble rather than from the presence of trouble. From the cradle to the grave, fear casts its baleful shadow. Fear betrays man's spirit, breaks down his defence, disarms him in battle, unfits him for the work of life, and adds terror to the dying bed.)]

Now back to the text and its setting. You will recall that once their panic had subsided, thanks to His mastery of wind and wave, Jesus asked the obvious question -- "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Mark it well, friend. It is significantly put, for the opposite of faith is not "unfaith," but fear. And it is the perfect love of God in Christ which sets us free from fear.

Very shortly we shall receive the Sacrament. Whatever you may understand by it - - see it again as God coming to us personally and completely in Christ - - and what may also be added: come to us precisely!

Talk about the love of God that casts out fear, and you may then ask - - - how do we know God is love? Jesus, of course, who was constantly saying "Fear Not" is the answer.

Herbert Farmer puts it well in his book "God and Men": "Discerning the love of God at work at that one point in historical time, the Christian is prepared to trust it over all history, all time; discerning it at that one point in space, he is prepared to trust it -- as it were -- in all places whatsoever, and over all space; discerning it at work in that particular complex of personal relationships which constitutes the earthly life of Jesus, he is prepared to trust it to be at work in all personal relationships whatsoever."

The New Testament declares the faith that Christ is Master of The Storm. There is no greater storm than that waged by the unleashed forces of evil. To those of us caught up in the sea of sin, tossed about and beset, Christ comes now and says - - fear not, I have redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature . . . !

#

"HOW THE STORY ENDED - - "

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The text for today's sermon is from one of the best-known stories in the entire New Testament, the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the 20th verse, and reads like this:

"And he arose and came to his father,
but while he was yet a great distance
his father saw him and had compassion . . ."

You may recognize this as the way the story of the Prodigal Son ends. The old man had two boys. They were as different, of course, as day is different from night. They are characterized as the younger and the elder. They are also characterized as the one who was eager to get away from home and the other who was perfectly content to stay put.

May I ask you a question. When you think of stories that you've read or that you have been told, do you remember them because of the way they began, or do you remember them because of the way they end? Well I suppose you might say to me, it all depends on what the beginning is, it all depends on the way the ending takes place. Well whether that's a good question or not I am not so certain, but I would suggest to you that you do remember the story of the Prodigal Son primarily because of the way the story ends.

Now having said that, let me endeavor to bring it into a focus for you briefly. The younger of the two boys came and said, "Father, I can't

stand it here any longer - - I've got to get away.

" . . I know that some day when you die I'll enjoy
some measure of inheritance, I know that you're
thinking of me in that regard. I can't wait.
Give me now what some day you would give me. Let
me have it now - - - "

....which is a characteristic, you see, of many who are young: "I don't
want to wait -- I want it now!" This is one reason why we call them the
Now generation -- not willing to wait . . . NOW!

....well, for whatever the reason, the old man subscribed
to the impatient young man's request, and the young man
left home.

I don't know how you picture it, but I'm willing to believe that the
old man never got over it. He never quite made the adjustment to the fact
that the younger of his two boys would leave home. And so I think I can
see him night after night after night....standing there....straining his
eyes, looking down the lane, hoping perhaps he might see some figure that
he'd recognize, that it would be his returning son.

And I'm willing to believe that night after night he tossed in bed
until sleep would overtake him just because he was completely fatigued. And
as he tossed back and forth, wondering where his boy was, what he was doing,
what he was thinking, what he was causing to have happen to other people, and
what might be happening to him.....

....well, as the story goes, the young
man "came to himself" -- that's the way it's expressed in classic fashion --

and decided to head home. And this is the way this part of the story ends: ...the old man recognized him, and he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him, and welcomed him home. As far as the Prodigal Son is concerned, the story ends by his returning home. I'm not now talking about the elder brother, I'm simply talking about this chapter and the way this chapter ends.

But now there is always some value to this. Instead of looking at the situation the way it actually ends, ask yourself how otherwise it might have ended. And that's why I have come to this sacred desk this morning, to encourage you to think in this way. Since the ending of this chapter is as important as it is, think of other endings that might have been given to this chapter.

Here's one. Suppose the boy would never have returned. Suppose out there in the far country he would have come to an untimely and ugly end. Now all along the line he had moments when perhaps he would have thought that some day he might have returned, but he kept putting it off. This chapter could end this way - - - he took what he asked the old man for, went out into the far country, wasted every bit of it, had his own health destroyed and did a great deal of harm to other people...and was either murdered or died of disease at an early age. That's the way the story could have ended, because that's the way the story ^{ends} ~~xxxx~~ now in some people's lives who somehow resemble this chapter.

Or perhaps the story could have ended like this -- listen now -- the old man died before the boy returned. Suppose his emotional health was so broken that he became broken physically - - suppose even, you can put it this way, he died of a broken heart! As I indicated earlier, he never quite made the adjustment that his son left home. That's the way the story might have

ended, that the young fellow having come to his senses, comes back home only to discover that it's too late.

Now I've dealt with people long enough to know that pride can strike a very crippling blow. Maybe the young fellow had accepted a dare to himself and said, I'm going to go, I'm going to stick it out...

...but every
now and then he does think of home and then he thinks,
well maybe I ought to go back. And then he says to
himself, but I don't know that I can accept defeat -- I
didn't make a go of it, so I'm not going to go back as
one who's beaten....and as he wrestles with that, in
the meantime the old man dies.

Or perhaps, look at it this way - - - it takes a bit of doing to go back and face those whom you have hurt, honestly it does! It's not a very easy thing to go back and look into the eyes of those who love you dearly, and have always loved you, and then to discover for the first time what you've done to them.

I once went to visit a murderer in what was at that time the Eastern State Penitentiary outside of Philadelphia. And I remember so well what he told me. He said the thing that was hardest for him wasn't to hear the judge pronounce the sentence and to send him to jail for thirty years. The hardest thing that he ever had to face was to look into the eyes of his father when his father came to see him for the first time in jail - - and then to discover what he had done to his father!

Well there are people who are sensitive, you see, and they realize that they have done the wrong thing, and they themselves pay a price for having done the wrong thing! But it's not easy to look into the eyes of

somebody else who is also paying a price because of what you have done. And so maybe in the far country the younger of the two boys kept putting off going home because he knew how hard it would be to face the eyes of loved ones.

Give him credit for that - - !

Or perhaps think of it this way, knowing human nature as you do, that when the younger of the two sons decided to come back home, he found out that the old man's heart was hardened, and bitter - - not a loving compassionate father that we have, but exactly the opposite. The Superintendent of the Pennsylvania State Police in the area in which I once lived was a member of the parish that I served for the first time. And he once told me about a girl who had gone from home, and the father's heart was so embittered that he never forgave her. She died a terrible death - - - but suppose in the meantime she would have returned, and the door would have been closed.....

...it could have ended like that, I tell you, it could have ended like that. You see, when we have done the best that we know how, when we've given the best that we have, and then to have it refused! -- to have someone that you love turn his back upon you and to go away and say 'I don't want you any longer' ! - - it takes a bit of doing to keep your heart from becoming embittered.

And suppose the young fellow would have come back home, and that's the way the chapter would have ended - - - the old man would have said, "I don't know you. I've closed you out of my life!"

I want to stop at this moment to suggest to you that you think of yourself as a wayward child of God. You see, you and I, every single one of us, have our moments when we stray from God . . . every single one of us have times when we have deliberately refused what God wants to give us: His love --

and we go out into the far country, if not geographically, then at least emotionally -- every single one of us has had his moments when he'd like very much to have been in the Garden of Evil.....and I dare say every single one of us in this place this morning has had his moments when he's known, when he wasn't meant to be out there, he was meant to be back within reach of his Heavenly Father. So we keep coming back.

And what if we had a God who would say, "I've washed my hands of you -- you can't come back." Did it ever occur to you that every single Lord's Day when you and I come back we begin at the very same point and we say, "Dear God, we're a bunch of sinners, that's what we are, and ever since last Sunday some of us have been thinking some things that we shouldn't have thought, we've been saying some things that we shouldn't have said, and we've done some things that we shouldn't have done. And now we have come back to you, and we ask you to open the door of your heart and to receive us." And suppose the story would end at that point and God would say, "Oh, no you don't! -- I'm fed up with you! -- my heart is hardened - - I will not receive you." Suppose that's the way the story might have ended! But it didn't.

For when Jesus told the story He told the story because He wanted us to know exactly what the love of God is like. The love of God is like a waiting father, who no matter how far we may go away, and no matter how great the sin may be that we commit, He's waiting and waiting and waiting for us to return. When we come back, His arms are outstretched to receive us.

This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE RISK-TAKER"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The preacher presumably saw him from the corner of his eye and knew that sooner or later he'd engage him in conversation. There are always people like that, you see, who once a man begins to speak they get closer and closer, waiting for their chance to ask the hard question.

Well, Jesus wasn't the only man who saw the fellow. Presumably the disciples were aware of him too, and it could be that they whispered among themselves and said, "Watch for this! The Master will surely put him in his place!" - - for they too had sized him up: he was the kind of fellow who thought that he had done a day's work for the Lord simply by talking about religious truths, simply by asking questions which had a religious significance....as though just by talking about these things you had done service for the Lord.

Now that's about the way it was when the man came and raised the question about eternal life. And then he asked a couple of other questions. They were good questions, but again let it be said, he happened to be the kind of fellow who allowed himself to think that if you simply talked about religious truths, you almost had it made. So Jesus really put him in his place, and put him in his place by telling him a story, the story that was read by Mr. Sieger today as the third Lesson, the Gospel for the Day. Perhaps for many people it's one of the most popular of all the stories that Jesus ever told, the one that we easily remember. It's the story of the Good Samaritan. Let me quickly relate it for you.

A man travels from Jerusalem to Jericho, and on the way he's way-laid by robbers who strip him, who bruise him up, who leave him half-dead, once they had robbed him. And then, as you might suspect, other people come along that way. Two people presumably are on their way to attend a church meeting -- that's the way it's frequently referred to -- they were so heavenly-minded that they couldn't be any earthly good at that time, and they never so much as recognized their obligation to do something for the fellow and they skirted the issue and walked by on the other side...

...and then there came a man, a rather unlikely candidate for compassion, but lo and behold! -- he gets off his donkey, walks over to where the man is, and begins to do something about it...draws upon his own resources in order to meet the need, and then puts the man on his own beast of burden, goes to the next town, guarantees him food and bed and undoubtedly medical attention as well....and then says to the man in charge of that place, "Whatever he needs, see that he gets -- don't be afraid -- pay him attention, and then when I come back I'll see that your obligation is met."

. . . and then Jesus said, "When you talk about eternal life, I want to take you out of the classroom and its discussion and put you in the arena of life itself, for 'I know what you say may be true,' is the old platitude, 'but the real test is, what do you do?'" . . .

So Jesus said, "Remember this man, and what he did, and you do likewise."

Jesus quit talking then about answers-and-questions, and questions-and-answers. He came down heavily on the side of action: "Do it, as this fellow did. You are meant for eternal life if you prove yourself a neighbor to a man who happens to be in need. And any man who happens to be in need becomes your

neighbor, and you should be as a neighbor to him."

It is surprising, isn't it, how even though Jesus told parables to get a point across, but sometimes we don't quite get the point. And maybe some of us remain youngsters at heart in more than one way. As an example, the little boy who went to Sunday School when this lesson was being taught, and when he came home and as his mother was wont to do, she asked him what the Sunday School lesson was about, and so he related for her the parable of the Good Samaritan. He had all the facts right, and he had his people in their right character roles. He told the story just as it had been told to him. And then his mother very correctly said, "Now what is the story meant to reach us?" And the little boy immediately answered, "Mommy, it simply means that when we're in trouble, other people should come and help us."

- - and that, of course, is not the point of the parable! But man, basically egotistical, thinks always in terms of other people meeting his needs. God who gives life is always saying to us, ask not what life can bring to you, but in God's name, ask what you can bring to life. There are any number of people who go through life absolutely miserable because they dwell on the fact that they're being short-changed -- they think of all the things they're not getting out of life. That wandering preacher, once a carpenter, said, "~~Yyan~~ Think about giving, not getting!" - - and that, too, is the point of this parable.

But now for our purpose this morning, if you don't mind, let me suggest to you that anyone who travels the road called Life travels a risky road, and I think God has a way of putting a sign on the Road which is the Highway of Life, and the sign simply reads: "TRAVEL AT SOME RISK" - - - any man who travels the Highway of Life travels at some risk. Let's not forget that.

Now also for our purpose this morning let's deal with the Gospel Lesson at hand and see how the Good Samaritan took one risk after another. The good

deed was done, but at some risk. Love always involves a risk. As an example: as soon as he got off from his donkey, as soon as he stopped and took one step in the direction of the victim, he was taking a risk. You see, chances are that those rascals, the robbers, might have continued to use the victim as a decoy, they could have said to themselves, Let's do it twice in one morning! -- Let's get a bonanza out of this thing, not just rob one fellow but we'll use the victim to rob the second fellow -- surely there might be somebody who would be constrained by compassion, so the victim becomes the decoy.....and as soon as the Samaritan steps in the direction of the victim, he takes a risk, a risk of being robbed, a risk of being hurt, a risk of being treated exactly as the other fellow had been treated. Love always involves some risk.

The second thing: as soon as he began to do something, lift the fellow up on his own donkey, he ran the risk of involvement. For one thing, you see, that's done eventually leads to something else that needs to be done. You walk through one door into a person's life, and lo and behold! -- another door begins to open, and still another, and another, and another!

- - which leads to the third risk that this man undertook, that when he got to the place where he could look to somebody else for some help, he simply couldn't hand the chap to this man and say, "Now he's your obligation." He couldn't pack his own bags and get the next donkey caravan out of town, and say, I've done my deed for the day, for the week, as far as this man's concerned I have fulfilled my obligation. But again I say, you open one door into a man's life and you open another, and another, and another. Love generally understood, always means continued involvement. When you become identified with another person, things never are as was. A new dimension has been added, a new relationship has been introduced that cannot be ignored, that cannot be discredited. So the Samaritan as he traveled that road traveled

a risky road and was willing to take the risk.

I have been reading this past week, I've finished it now, it's a paperback, you can read it in a very brief period of time -- a book written by a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest: "Why Am I Afraid To Love?" I suggest to you this morning that many people are afraid to love because love always involves a risk. Permit me a personal observation, will you? The human perspective cannot be ignored. When I think of my mother, now of sainted memory, of the risks that she was constantly taking for us six kids, how she stayed up hours into the early morning until my brother, of course, got home...how when we were ~~is~~ ill, at the risk of her own deteriorating health, maintained her vigil and nursed us back to health...how in one anxious moment after another as the years passed she lived in no detached way the life that each one of us was called upon to live, and entered into with some measure of identification all of the obligations that we took upon ourselves. . . . from a human perspective, the risk that a mother takes when she brings a child into the world.

I suggest to you also that you remember that God is the great risk-taker. God, if you please, is the great gambler. The risk that God is always taking with us -- never quite certain how the investment that He makes in us might come out, but He makes the investment just the same, and whenever you make any kind of an investment you exercise some measure of risk.

I have reached the point in life, I tell you unashamedly, when I continue to thank God for all the people that He raised up in my life who are willing to risk something in my behalf -- which puts me to shame when I realize how little of myself I really risk in behalf of other people. Come now, honestly, most of us play it safe. Most of us in our relationship with people are rather cautious in how much we give of ourselves. We just can't stand the thought that we could be hurt -- not loved in return -- not dealt with graciously when we happen to

be kind, easily or out of sense of profound obligation. But God goes on.

God's risk was so great that it took His Son to Calvary's brow. God put everything He had in it. Some of us are perfectly willing to go on traveling the Highway called Life because inevitably we're bound to meet someone, no matter how many rascals there may be, there's bound to be somebody who is willing to take the risk to improve our situation. And that's what makes life really worth living. They're still around.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"I AM THE WAY - - - "

It was when Dwight David Eisenhower was president of that college that the Superintendent of Grounds and Buildings of Columbia asked for an appointment. When the Superintendent came in, he made known to him that his gripe was simply this: he couldn't quite control the students on the campus, because they refused to walk on the pathways that had been laid out for them. They were always taking short-cuts. Dwight David Eisenhower dealt with that in much the same fashion that another college president dealt with the very same problem, for when George Washington Carver was President of his Institute down south, somebody came to him with a similar complaint....and bless his soul, he simply said, "Well, if this is the problem, if you can't keep them on the sidewalks, then simply take a good look as to where they are walking, and pave the paths, then, under their feet."

Now I suggest to you that that may be perfectly alright for laying out sidewalks on a college campus -- put the pavement down where they are accustomed to walking, let them lay out the route -- again let me say, that may be perfectly alright for laying out routes and walkways on a college campus. But it is not a method to be trusted where ethics and morality are concerned. But there's always a temptation on our part, you see, to establish for ourselves some pattern of morality which is according to the way that the masses move. Without thinking earnestly enough, before we realize it we're subscribing to a pattern of behavior that is the pattern of behavior of the masses, and just because everyone else moves on in that direction, we think it's perfectly alright, then, for us to establish that pattern of behavior. It's not to be trusted.

The Devil, of course, is always active, and he's active in many ways. And because he knows that we are gullible in this way, he uses people who make scientific studies as agents of his, he uses film directors and movie producers as agents of his. Let me be perfectly frank with you, in this whole matter of sexual morality, there are those who make so-called scientific surveys, and they come up with some kind of a report saying that so-many women -- it's been proven now! -- cheat on their husbands.....and then they come up with so-called facts and figures and say so-many husbands have extra-marital affairs. And impressed by the evidence, they parade it and say, This is the way society is moving!

...build your path under that walkway, and
establish it then, once and forever, as a behavior pattern.

When I first became your Pastor and before we were able to add to our staff one person directly responsible for youth ministry, I used to meet with some of the parents....and one thing that I remember as clearly as I heard our young people this morning was this: parents saying to me, "But you have no idea how difficult it is for us to try to lay down patters of behavior for our own kids, when we find out the peer pressure to which they are exposed -- the constant pressure on the part of other people to get them to move in the direction in which they are moving without any thought at all as to where the path itself may take them -- what may happen five years from now if they continue to walk in this particular pattern - - - "

One moves into the political arena, and one hears this said in this manner: "It's been done before -- this is the name of the game! How do you suppose this man happened to go as far as he's gone if it weren't for the fact that he took short-cuts. He's simply doing what anyone before him has done . . . ".....with

all the strength that I can command, I say to you as earnestly as I can, the judgment of the masses is not always to be trusted. Don't believe the wit who said that the "voice of the people is the voice of God." I say this to you on good authority, where morals are concerned, where ethics are involved, you simply can't trust the masses. God has always had problems with the masses. You know your Bible history -- look what a tough time the masses of people gave Him at the foot of Mount Sinai, when He had taken a solitary soul up into the mountain and laid before him the pathway that the Chosen People should takeand as God saw fit to work through that individual, look how the masses turned that over upside-down at the foot of Mount Sinai! God's always had trouble with the masses, so it would seem, where morality and ethics are concerned.

You're not forgetting, are you, what happened on that Thursday night in the great city of Jerusalem -- it was the mass of people that gave comfort to Pontius Pilate with that shout: "Crucify! - - Crucify! - - We reject God and all that God stands for!" Reinhold Neibuhr was perfectly right when years ago he wrote his book called: "Moral Man In Immoral Society." It may be perfectly alright to lay out the walks under the feet of the students on a college campus because they are prone to take short-cuts, but I rise to speak a word of caution to all who think they can take short-cuts across the campus called Morality. It's dangerous business.

Several years back there was a film produced by one of the agencies of the church, I've forgotten the name of it, but I presume they were thinking much in the same direction that I have been trying to take you in this brief sermon this morning. There was a series of scenes in that film, depicting a group of people, I presume in Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan - - a mob of people going down one stairway.....and if you watched the camera closely with what it had to reflect,

you saw the same faces coming back up the other stairway. You got that, didn't you? -- a group of people going down one stairway...and seconds later the same group of people coming up an opposite stairway...going down, coming up....going down, coming up. What really happened was this: the turn-style at the foot of those stairs had been broken, and there was no chance to get on the subway or the Long Island train, and the people going down never so much as stopped to ask the people why they were immediately coming back. They simply followed, and nobody asked the question as to where their pathway would eventually take them.

Centuries ago a carpenter's-son-turned-preacher went around from place to place, investing Himself in the lives of ordinary folks. And once He said to them the words that constitute the text for this brief sermon:

"I am the way, the truth and the life -- follow me . . . "

One solitary voice, which constitutes the very voice of God, still calls to us down through the centuries of time. The echo of His voice is still to be heard through the corridors of Eternity: "I am the way -- follow me!"

...and that's what we're about in Saint Luke Church, my friend, every Lord's Day when we come back to this place. Some of us are trying to get re-oriented, to get on the path on which He leads us. This is what we are about in Saint Luke Church as we invest our time and our energy in the lives of those who are young, to set them behind the Master -- who as He journeys toward the Gate of Heaven, Jesus Christ knows exactly where He is going. And Jesus Christ knows exactly where we were meant to head. And I am happy to tell you that all those who have gone before us call back to us and they say to us: "It's worth it! Stick to the road! Don't lose it! -- You can trust Him!"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO LEARN TO PRAY - - "

THE WORLD, O GOD, is too much with us, and we have too little time to do the sort of thing that we would like to do right now, to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. That we should make the most of the opportunity, we now ask for Your Holy Spirit to guide us and to direct us, and to make us sensitive to what truth could be proclaimed. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord.
Amen.

In company with many of you, whenever I head for the hills of home, there are any number of things that seem to make their claim upon my time or concern. At almost any bend in the road one could stop anywhere and engage someone in conversation and talk about other days or to think of other things.

Quite frequently when I head up Lycoming Creek Road on Route 15, not far from where we have our little place in the hills, I stop at that auction shop. I knew the man, of course, who established it, and I know now his sons who operate it in a worthy tradition. And like as not when I enter, the man who is the guiding principal in the firm now will single me out and give me some measure of attention for which I am grateful.

On Wednesday of this past week, with a happy look in his eye he said, "Come, I've got something to show you!" I hadn't the slightest idea what it might be, because in those different rooms that he has he may have an entire estate that somebody is trying to settle, and they've asked him to take care of the auction....or it may be a series of items that somebody has brought

to him and is willing to have offered for sale on a contractual basis.....or occasionally he finds something himself that strikes his fancy, and he'll hold it for personal sale or have a general auction. Well it's in that latter category that I found myself looking at his prize item on Wednesday of this past week.

He told me by way of background that week that this item was in this man's attic for almost two decades now. The man had kept it there because he didn't want anybody to know that he had it. He didn't want to have to face the embarrassing questions or perhaps be misunderstood. Now let me tell you at once what it is: it's an oil painting of Adolph Hitler. This chap had been in the great World War II and was in a position where he could get this, and with his own knife he cut it out of the frame, rolled it up and put it in his belongings (whatever he could bring back with him, of course) to the States. It is an unusual picture of Adolph Hitler, one that I'm not at all happy to tell you about.

Adolph Hitler is interpreted by the artist as the Messiah of the World. He's standing there almost in regal splendor, and round about his feet is the gathered company of humanity, interpreted in a variety of roles . . .

- - there is the farmer with his pitch-fork

- - there is the student with his book

....you name any walk of life, you name any age -- they're all there, around the feet of the 'Messiah' as the artist now is interpreting Adolph Hitler. They all have the upturned look, as though they are saying to themselves, as the artist would have them say: "Here's our hope! -- Here's the promised one!"

I don't know, when you think of Adolph Hitler, how frequently a picture like that comes into your mind. But having said that, I come to this sacred desk to ask you, when you think of Jesus Christ -- the Messiah -- what picture

first comes into your mind? I would suggest that anyone who thinks of Jesus Christ should have a kind of a picture book at hand, a mental one of course, so that when you turn its pages you have one portrait after another of Jesus Christ. It's a very healthy, a veru salutary thing to use a sanctified imagination and to paint pictures of Jesus Christ.

When you think of Him now - - let me go back and ask that question very earnestly - - - what is the first picture of Jesus Christ that comes to your mind when you think of Him? I don't mind telling you that I'm fully aware of the fact that God put His claim upon my soul to be a preacher, and naturally we've been told to take as our example the greatest of all preachers, and I have my moments when I think of Jesus Christ as the Man-who-came-preaching - - who was able to stand up in front of people and give them unforgettable pictures of God. And when I think of Jesus Christ, I have my moments when I think of Him as the Preacher.....

I have my moments also when I think of Jesus Christ, picturing Him as one who came teaching. He never lost a moment, you see, He never lost an opportunity to gather people around Him.....even a solitary woman at the well -- He exploited that moment and taught her things that she hadn't concerned herself with before. There's a knock on the door at night, He opens it -- it's a man named Nicodemus, a very learned person....and Jesus exploits that also, and turns that midnight encounter into a teaching situation. He had a handful of men who had traveled down a dusty road for one village to another, and like as not they'd stop every now and then.....and Jesus would see a man with his bag slung over his shoulder, reaching in for some seed and scattering it...and Jesus would exploit that moment and turn it into a teaching situation. There are some of us who when we first think of Jesus Christ, we think of Him as the teacher, the moralist.

A week from tomorrow morning we have our annual Saint Luke Week at Camp. I'm grateful for the fact that the Assistant Pastor who is the Director of that camp has asked me to go along to serve on the staff, and he's given me an assignment, to teach a course on the Miracles of Jesus. And as I have been preparing for that assignment, I have been intrigued all over again with Jesus as the Miracle-worker

- - the man who could lay claim to a boy's lunch --
and Jesus becomes the "Food-stretcher" just by taking
the barley loaves and the fishes and feeding five
thousand people.....

- - I have been intrigued at how He's caught up in a
crowd of people, and a little lady, somewhat shy,
suddenly becomes bold and honestly believes that all
she has to do is never so much as say a word to Him,
but simply touch the hem of His garment, and this indefinable
issue of blood that's been plaguing her for
years is miraculously stopped!

...there are people who when they first think of Jesus Christ, think of Him
as the miracle-worker.

There are some people who when they first think of Jesus Christ, think
of Him as the Man-Who-Knew-How-To-Win-Friends-and-Influence-People -- Norman
Rockwell fashion, He could stretch forth His hand a point His finger to a
man named Andrew and say, "I need you".....or to a man keeping books in
the seat of custom, and Matthew gets up and closes the books and walks away!
....or He goes down to the place where men are mending their nets, and He
says, "You're meant to be a fisher of men" -- and Simon Peter walks away,

never again returns to being a fisherman as his day's vocation.

Some of us are absolutely fascinated that when we first think of Jesus Christ we think of Him as one who came laying a claim upon men's souls and minds and gaining their allegiance.

Well, I don't know how when you first think of Jesus Christ, what comes into your mind. I am eternally grateful for what I dare say to you is invariably the picture of Jesus Christ that's painted on the fabric of my mind as ever so frequently I think of Him, perhaps more so even than Jesus Christ hanging upon the cross or turning away from an empty grave. Are you interested? Would you like to hear what's the first picture that comes to my mind ordinarily when I think of Jesus Christ?

It goes back to the days when I was a lad and I sat in Bethany Lutheran Church in Montoursville, Pennsylvania. I admired the preacher greatly -- he was a man of much integrity, and a true shepherd of souls. But I would be less than honest if I didn't tell you that again and ever so often his sermons went right over my head, I hardly understood a word that he was saying. So I sat there, and what did I do? - - -

...I had my moments when I counted the beams in the ceiling, back and forth.....and then the exposed organ pipes -- I'd count them from the right, I'd count them from the left.....

....and then on a summer's day, when the windows were opened -- it was a second-floor church -- I'd look out through the windows, and I could picture the town hall that housed the fire company, Willing Workers Hose #1. The second floor of the town hall was also the town library, and I'd think how we'd go to check out a book,

some of us youngsters -- not so much to check out a book as to perhaps furtively to be able to slide down the pole and stand in amazement at the fire truck! This is what I thought about occasionally.....

But it wasn't all for naught. Like as not, my mind always came back to something within those walls, for above the altar in that church was a life-size painting of Jesus Christ upon His knees in the Garden of Gethsemane. And to this very day when I think of Jesus Christ, like as not the first picture that comes to my mind is Jesus Christ, the Man-of-Prayer.

Now all of this is prompted by the third Lesson that was read for us this morning -- an introductory verse of the Gospel serves as a text for this sermon, it's the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"When He was praying in a certain place, when He finished, one of His disciples came to Him and said, 'Lord, teach us to pray'. . . "

With all the strength that I can command, I suggest to you this morning that you never really see Jesus Christ -- you never really understand Him as He is, until you first see Him as the Man-of-Prayer. It is important that we see Him as the Miracle-worker.....it is important that we see Him as the Recruiter-of-Men, the winner-of-friends.....it is important that we see Him as the Man-Who-Came-Predching-and-Teaching. But far more important than that, we must see Him as the Man-upon-His-knees. It was only as He first communicated with God that He was able to communicate the truth of God to us. It was only as He was able to see the divine perspective that He was able to say to us: "This is the way -- walk in it." It was only as He found Himself continually in the presence of God that He was able to say to others: "I will never leave you -- I will never forsake you." It was only as He basked in the sunlight of God's presence that He was able to say to us: "I will give you His peace." What He first received from God, then He was able to give to us,

and I have no patience whatsoever with people who believe that Jesus Christ prayed as He did because He happened to be perfect. Because He prayed as He did, He became perfect. It's the prayer life of Jesus Christ which is the basis for His behavior. It's the prayer life of Jesus Christ that justified the manner of His living among us. To the everlasting credit of that disciple, he made the great discovery of having found Jesus on His knees, he came and said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

The one thing that the Christian Church needs now more than ever before is to discover all over again the Man-of-Prayer in Jesus Christ. A Messiah does not drop down fully fashioned from Heaven. The mistake of mistakes that Adolph Hitler made was simply to allow himself to believe and to perpetuate the falsehood that other people followed, that a man simply stands in front of you and automatically exudes authority -- automatically requires respect. Even with God, things just don't happen automatically. He who was the Perfect One among us became perfect in our midst, as He kept Himself the Man-of-Prayer.

Don't forget it, He was human....and I'm not short-changing His divinity one bit when I remind you of that! He did become tired, He did become weary, He did become thirsty, He did become hungry, and He did become impatient with His followers. You can read for yourself how every now and then He took time and took them to task and said, "Have you been so long with me that you don't know this!".....and He who tried to teach them the meaning of faith every now and then would have to say to them: "How is it that you have no faith?".....recognizing, of course, that for three years He'd been investing in them. And He never gave up faith in them. He never gave up on them. He never ran out of love. He was never less than God.....and it just didn't happen, because He was fundamentally the Man-of-Prayer.

It's no secret now, some of you know it very well, that daily I am

sobered, humbled, and made grateful for every good thing that we're privileged to know in Saint Luke Church as a people together....and I am fully aware of the fact that it doesn't just happen. When I recognize the strength of this congregation, also mindful of its weaknesses, but when I recognize the strength, I first name the fact that every single home in this congregation is being prayed for daily! Are you aware of that! -- every single one of you who is a member of this parish, before you came today or before the night ends, someone will have lifted you up in the arms of their prayers.

And if you should be a visitor here, are you aware of the fact that this morning at 8:00 o'clock, in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, a handful of people prayed for you? I clipped for future reference an article that may some day become an inspiration for a sermon, the thing that our generation lacks today is mastering the art of praying. We need to reach the point where the disciple came and found Jesus Christ on His knees, an unforgettable experience.....and the net result:

"Jesus, You'd better teach it to us! - - "

....may we learn well.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHY ARE YOU SO FEARFUL - - ?"

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, Thy Son
our Lord. Amen.

Let me begin at the point at which every sermon ought to begin, hope-fully to continue and to conclude, with, of all things, a text. And the text for today's sermon is from the oldest Gospel record, the way that man Mark put it down regarding the life and teachings of Jesus, the 40th verse of the 4th chapter -- the words spoken by our Blessed Lord to a little company of men who were referred to as His disciples. He said to them:

"Why are you so fearful? How is
it that you have no faith? . . ."

That's our Blessed Lord for you -- handling the situation magnificently, giving us a case study in two questions, where the second of the two questions becomes the answer to the first question.

The text can stand by itself. Not every text, however, can be taken out of context. But even if you knew nothing at all about this historical setting, these words have a way of pricking the believer and bringing him up short. But for our purpose this morning let's take the wider look and understand as best we can the situation that occasioned these words by the Master of Men.

Well, they had to get from where they were to the other side of the lake, so some of them were in the boat. A storm came up at sea. They became panic-stricken -- forgetting of course that He was with them. Bereft and bewildered, it did occur to them then that they might turn to Him, and as they turned to Him He expresses a measure of disappointment. He had hoped for much more, you see, but it just wasn't there when the chips were down. So, as He was wont to

do, quietly and calmly, He took over in their behalf, calmed the troubled waters, stilled the sea, and endeavord to do the same for them. And in quieting them He took them to task: "WHY....are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

You know very well, of course you do, that man is by nature a fearful person. You've heard me tell you this before, that there are those who tell us that we are born into the world with at least two fears. The next time you observe a child, and you may hold that child in your hands, notice what happens when somebody shouts loudly -- the child will begin to cry, because we're born into the world with the fear of the sound of a loud noise....

...and if perchance something should cause you to drop your arms quickly or suddenly while you're holding that child, the child will begin to cry, for instinctively the child will cry at the prospect of being dropped.....

Then as we go through years of development after birth and childhood, we accumulate any number of fears, we acquire them easily! and man is by nature fearful.

I suppose if we were to turn this into an old-fashioned testimonial meeting, practically every one of us would stand up and give some evidence of the fears that possess him. Victor Hugo, bless his soul, was so aware of human nature that he wrote a trilogy of novels -- are you aware of that? Do you know why he wrote "Toilers of the Sea"? -- he wrote "Toilers of the Sea" because he was impressed by the fact that man was afraid of the power and forces of nature. How frequently man is at the mercy of nature itself.

-- Victor Hugo also discovered that man is afraid of his fellow-man -- he found himself cast with others, caught up with them and their lives and their

problems, their trials and their tribulations....so he wrote the second of his three novels, and do you know what it was? Of course you do: "Les Miserables"

- - and as you might surmise, it occurred to Victor Hugo that man is afraid of God, afraid of what God could do to him, afraid of what God could cause to happen in His world, and so he wrote that third novel: "Notre Dame de Paris."

Do you remember what I've told you on occasion, that any man who has been in the ministry a decade or more also has the trilogy of fears that characterize the people whom he ministers to by the grace of God. In these almost two decades now, when I've walked closely with some of you, or on occasion I have been able to gain some insight into your life, you don't always have to spell it out, but when I walk away -- would you believe it? -- that I have my moments when I pray that God would help you to handle your fears....

...some of you are fearful of what's happened before, you know that. There was that act of indiscretion, some years back, you see, that reckless moment, and you rue the day that you ever met that person... in your weakness, you try to blot it out of your mind. And you have your times when you fairly succeed, but the trouble is that there are other people who happen to have remembered it, and there are some people who can never have done with other people's past. For shame - twice shame upon them! For you see, they're not remembering that in God's sight, every saint has his past...and every sinner has his future!

There are some people who are troubled by the fear of the present moment - - it's so demanding, it's so inescapable.....the things that are locked

into the agenda of Life which is labeled Today. It can't be put off, and they're not sure that they are going to be made adequate to the problems of today, and they're afraid of the present moment.

Then there are people who are afraid of the future. The past is over. Today will be gone before too long.....but then there's always tomorrow, and a successive chain of tomorrows. It occurred to me some time ago when I was filling out a medical form, checking off all the things I've never had.....and what a measure of satisfaction it brought to me until I was sobered by the thought that just because I never had them is no sure guarantee that I won't still get them, because I remember other people, and what their history has been....

...I can well understand how a woman, seated by herself, given to some time of reflection, happens to remember Aunt Nellie, who never had a sick day in her life...and then one night as she was disrobing, she discovered that lump...she made an appointment with a physician, he referred her to the surgeon, the surgeon gave her four-to-six months.....and he was right! For within the fifth month she completed her earthly pilgrimage. So the woman reasons to herself, if that was in her future, it could be in my future.....

Frankly, for the life of me, as I try to understand human nature and by the grace of God to try to minister to the problems of human nature, I can never understand how a man can be married to a woman for thirty years, and then decide that he can walk away from her, and choose somebody else.so I can readily understand it, how a woman at this point who has been married for twenty-five years can begin to become fearful: what guarantee

do I have that what happened to her won't happen to me?

So one faces the future.....fearful.

I've tried to keep a close relationship with parishioners who are engaged in business enterprises. Occasionally I counsel those who have had a partnership for two decades. Things went along swimmingly...and then, for some almost unexplainable reason, the partnership is dissolved, and a man begins to lose his life savings. Something happens to his ego in the process.

- - I can understand how a man who is in the prime of life surveys the scene, anticipates the future and says: What guarantee do I have that this won't happen to me, and to my partner? So he is afraid.

I have a strange notion that I'm going to suggest to you now. I am going to suggest to you that whatever a man is at 9:00 o'clock in the morning, and whatever a man is at 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, he is more so by 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock at night, or whatever may be his bed-time. For when he crawls into bed and the covers are tucked around him, or, with this kind of weather, thrown aside - - ~~in~~ the intensity of his frame of mind in the course of the day sets in: and in the closing hours of the night fear or faith takes over. This I most certainly believe.

H. G. Wells once observed that any number of people who ought to go to bed at night and sleep ~~to~~ back and forth, kept awake by their fears. Down through the corridors of time comes the haunting voice of Jesus Christ - -

"Why are you fearful?"

Did you ever hear the legend about the man who was driving a horse and cart on his way to Constantinople....and as he headed toward the city he saw by the side of the road a woman -- small, frail, a hooded creature. Moved by

pity, he stopped to give her a lift, to take her along into the city. He seated her down alongside of him in the cart. He became a bit uncomfortable -- she seemed to be so different, and curiosity got the best of him and to this creature he said, "Who are you?" And according to the legend, she answered, "I am the dreaded disease Cholera."

"Get down!" said he, "I will not take you with me into the city of Constantinople."

Then something unusual happened -- she used the persuasive powers of a woman, and she begged him to take her along with him into the city, and she arrived at a bargain: "Take me along," said she, "and I give you my promise, I will only kill five people. And as my pledge I give you this dagger, and when we meet again, as we will in Constantinople, you may stab me dead with this dagger if I have not kept my promise."

On they went into Constantinople. After the fifth day they met. He was fully aware of the fact that in those five days 120 people died of cholera in Constantinople. Enraged and infuriated, he raised the dagger to stab her dead. She said, "Stay your hand! I kept my promise. I killed only five -- Fear killed all the rest!"

Fear is the great crippler. I could end this sermon at this point, but I shan't. Because I am in duty bound to remind you that of all the things that we fear most, if we have any spiritual sensitivity at all, is the fear of going to Hell. Now, if you are spiritually insensitive, this doesn't bother you. But if you are spiritually sensitive, you and I know full well that none of us could ever earn enough merit in the sight of God to deserve to go to Heaven. And I'm numbered among those who believe that if it were not for the saving grace of Jesus Christ, we'd all drift to Hell. So against that fear of being damned, Jesus Christ looms upon the horizon and says, "Fear not" . . . and the words of

Martin Luther come to us: "Fear not . . . for I have redeemed you, a lost and condemned person . . . "

My friend, tossed about in the storm which is Life itself, allow yourself the blessed inner sense of peace. There are certain things you don't have to be afraid of. Fear not those who would destroy the body - - fear those who might destroy the soul, but gain strength in the knowledge that Jesus Christ redeemed you.

It's a grand and good thing to read the Bible as though you had never read it before, and every now and then come upon these words that become the echo of the voice of God: "Don't be afraid!"

....now it's one thing to tell people not to be afraid. It's another thing to give them the reasons why they need not fear. And if you don't know what they are, it's high time you find them out, because in them can lie your guarantee.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD'S GLORY IN THE MORNING"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Those of you who have the good fortune to have vacation periods and who may travel across the country find that, as your custom is when you go to God's House, you may discover that there are strange practices and unusual customs elsewhere, that perhaps when you cross the threshold of a congregation's place of worship where you've never been before, it could be that you might not know just what to expect. I find this to be true for myself.

I remember, I think it was last year, I went to worship during the vacation period elsewhere -- (or was it the year before?) -- and when I entered I discovered that this congregation was benefiting from the leadership of a new pastor. And as his wont, new pastors are eager to establish within the congregation to which they have been called certain things that are very important to them. And I presume this is one reason why some congregations would much rather have one pastor over a longer period of time than to expose themselves to a bit of shuffling every three or four years when a new pastor comes upon the scene.

Well, this new pastor had introduced a very simple thing: when it came time to preach the sermon, instead of announcing a text, instead of bowing his head in prayer, he simply looked to the congregation -- rather exuberantly -- and said: "Good morning!" And then when he got no response, he printed in the bulletin that when they would come next Sunday, they were expected to respond and say, "Good morning!" to him.

Well, it went on for several weeks, and then a friend of mine sent me a copy of the bulletin that resolved the whole matter. They had come to the conclusion that they would no longer continue this practice, even though perhaps it meant a great deal to the pastor. They'd taken a poll of the congregation in a comparatively short period of time, and they had discovered that some people thought it was irreverent....some people thought it didn't add anything to the service.....some people thought it detracteda few perhaps were enthusiastic about it. But I'm inclined to think -- I could be wrong! -- but remembering how exuberant the pastor was, I'm inclined to think that he was happy to see it discontinued because he couldn't stand a lethargic response. Because it just didn't go over, and there was something about his spirit that perhaps prompted him to think that when somebody said, "Good morning!" to somebody else, that if they could say it as strongly and as vigorously as he was wont to do, he wanted somebody to respond just as warmly and just as enthusiastically.

Well, how do you say "Good morning" to people? Do you suppose one could make the suggestion that people know something about our character by the way we say, "Good morning" to each other? I don't know how it may be in your book, but I'm inclined to think there ought always to be a ring in a person's voice when he says, "Good morning" . . . because there's something about a brand new day that ought to encourage a person spontaneously to greet it rather warmly and enthusiastically.

Coming back fresh from Nawakwa, I again was impressed by the way the leadership was able to establish in the minds of those who are young that God's glory is to be experienced when the day begins. And by the way, that's the text for today's sermon:

"And then in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord."

- - the 17th verse of the 16th chapter of the Book of the Exodus.

Well at camp this past week I had opportunity to witness the way the youngsters expressed reverence for the beginning of a day. It's a matter of tradition now -- you can't have a Saint Luke Week at camp without having Morning Watch. Now what is Morning Watch? -- in case you don't know. Well, it's the first thing that they do after they get up, even before breakfast. Each camper is required and directed to take his Bible in hand, and the especially prepared devotional material, and to go to a spot of his own choosing -- by himself, not in a cluster of people -- sit under a tree, on a ledge or a rock, and there meditate, for a quarter of an hour, and to think about, if you please, God's glory in the morning.

And it's a very valid thing for a man to recognize that each new day is a precious gift from God. Haven't some of you told me that there is a local radio commentator who usually incorporates in his morning program this sentiment: "Remember, today is the first day of the rest of your life!" -- and that in itself is something that would cause a man to face it gladly, because it means another beginning for all that lies ahead!

How do you feel about the morning? There's a woman in this congregation whom I highly regard, as well as her husband, and she tells me that as far as her husband is concerned, she never asks him a question before 12:00 o'clock noon -- he just can't get started! It's only perhaps at midday that he comes awake or alive or vital. Maybe it could be that way with you, I don't know. Maybe it's absolutely true that our body chemistry differs, and that a man and a woman can be entirely unlike as far as the night and the day may be concerned, and their willingness to greet either the day or the ending, gladly, enthusiastically.

But I must tell you now about that chap that I encountered in mid-Manhattan some years ago, when they still had elevator boys operating the elevator. I greet the morning gladly, I happen to be one of those who like to get up in

the morning, and there it was early in a mid-Manhattan morning. And as I headed toward the elevator I discovered there was a chap coming from the other direction, and I said "God morning!" to the elevator boy, and he responded very enthusiastically. But not so the chap who came from the other direction. And he said, "What makes you so happy so early in the day?" . . . and the elevator boy responded -- quite ~~xxx~~ spontaneously -- "Man, this is a brand new day! I've never lived this day before!"well now you think about that! Every day is a brand new day, is something that you've never lived before.

And to all intents and purposes it could be kind of . . .

...do you remember, years ago -- (Oh, I don't suppose there's anyone here in this place who can remember that far back, when youngsters went to the one-room school house)...and a youngster was given a slate, and on that slate he did his lessons. And I presume how pleased the youngster could be when every now and then the slate was wiped perfectly clean, and whatever mistakes he made, you see, now belonged to the past.....

Do you suppose it could be that way for us with a brand new day? -- God giving us a brand new slate -- blotting out what had been before, and saying, "Here -- begin all over again! And as you begin, see something of the glory of the Lord"

I have lived long enough to appreciate the interim period which is night, between our days, when darkness settles in, a time when we sleep, a time when perhaps we might be able to let God take over, a time perhaps when -- dare one say it, dare one think it? -- when forgetfulness can set in? Happy indeed is the man who can have that experience! -- particularly when he realizes how burdensome the day has been, how painful the pressure

and the mistakes that were made. And then to believe that when morning comes there can be a brand new day, a fresh start.

I don't keep a diary precisely -- hardly at all -- just bits and gems here and there I jot down, not always recording dates. But if I were one to keep a diary rigidly, I know exactly what I would have put down on April 18, 1969. I was staying in the Lancaster Hotel at the corner of 31st and Madison in New York City. And as I came down early in the morning to get a copy of the New York Times, I saw this rather nondescript character -- each hotel has its supply of them -- and she handed me the paper. And to her I said: "The top of the morning to you, and the rest of a happy day to follow!" I didn't expect the reply I got -- the words simply rolled out beautifully, poetically:

"Sauntering winds and the human spirit
Do well to see the dust and clear it;
So morning dreams and yearnings spark,
Explode with light, and clear the dark"

....something of a poet, in this nondescript character, who realized that when the dawn comes there comes the exploding light of a brand new day by which the dust could be cleared and the dark shadows put away.

Did I ever tell you about the time I underwent another physical -- we ought to do that, you know, periodically . . . and after the man-of-medicine had made all the tests he called me back to his office to review them and to interpret them. And I felt rather pleased with the bill of health he was able to give me at that time. And I was about to take my leave, and as I was about to go through the door, he said, "Oh, if you don't mind, come back. I forgot, there's one very important question that I need to ask. It doesn't appear on the form, but some two decades ago, in my practice of medicine, I decided to include this in a thorough-going physical examination."
...and I thought to myself, Good heavens, what's the question now? And lo

and behold, it was this very simple question: he said -- "How do you feel when you get up in the morning?" Now, good solid realistic practitioner that he was, he believed that you could tell something about a man's physical tone by the way he felt when he got up in the morning.

My heart goes out to anyone who drags his feet as the day begins, whatever may be the reason. Here is a brand new day. You never know what lies in front of you, what new-found joy could be there, what challenge, what crisis, what measure of stimulation. God bless those who greet the dawn, who allow themselves to be made sensitive to seeing something of the glory of the Lord in the morning.

G. H. Chesterton, bless his soul, referred one time to St. Francis of Assissi as a man who was always to be remembered as one who was surrounded by the burst of dawn. This is the way Chesterton put it about St. Francis:

"While it was yet twilight, a figure appeared silently and suddenly on a little hill above the city. Dark against the faded darkness, for it was the end of a long and stern night, a night of vigil, not unvisited by stars. He stood with his hands uplifted, as in so many statues and pictures, and about him was the burst of birds singing, and behind him was the break of day . . . "

Last evening some of the young people of the parish gathered for a very relaxed evening in Bieber Hall. It meant a great deal for them to be together. And then as was right and proper, because they are Christian, and because they must recognize the hand of God in all things that affect them, it was directed that they would not leave simply with the memory of a dance behind them, but that they would come here into the Nave. So they came at 10:30, and had provided for them a special order for worship as expression of the soul. Just at benediction time the leader spoke these words: "Go

now, remembering what we have shared here, and look toward each new day as a beginning."

In my book, I would suggest to you it's that way between God and us. God is always saying to us:

"Remember what I've given you -- remember what I
have shared with you . . .

...in days gone by I've shared with you my love

...in days gone by I've shared with you my peace

...in days gone by I've shared with you forgiveness

...in days gone by I've shared with you my outstretched,
sustaining, providing hands.

" - - remember it, and as a new day comes, don't be afraid'
Look to it."

Would you believe me, that even before the sun rises, Providence has gone ahead of us, to wait, to greet us. Which leads me to say to you what you ought never to forget, that when the Dawn-of-Dawns comes into your life, when the day-break of Heaven is yours, Jesus Christ will be saying to you,

"I have gone ahead. I will be waiting for you - - "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO WORK TO GOD'S GLORY"

YOU HAD so much in mind, O God, when you set aside one day in the week to be observed as we would observe it in this place. Now there's one thing in particular that claims us, that we might in this way give some measure of undivided attention to Your Holy Word. We would like to make the most of this opportunity, and that's why we're asking the help of Your Holy Spirit right now. Amen.

As far as Saint Luke Church is concerned, it's a good thing that Sunday didn't come this week on Tuesday, Wednesday or even Friday. The fact of the matter, you see, is that the chancel has been a mess. You're not aware of it today because it's fairly spotless. But what with all the details that have required attention recently, as an example, to get improved quality of the sound we have been forced to make new tonal openings into the organ chambers. You might not be able to see it from where you are seated, but it's true on either side. And that's meant taking a hammer and hammering away into the plaster, into the wall.

And then because we're going to have some exposed pipes on either side of the chancel, not nearly as pronounced as what we had here before, but just about 14 - 16 - 18 inches on either side -- we've had to remove that plaster ledge underneath the original openings. And that meant additional hammering away and more plaster dirt and dust.

And then while we were at it, we've installed two pull-down stairways here in the passageways on either side of the chancel, to have better access into the organ chambers that had to be installed, and framing had to be done.

So -- can you visualize it -- drop-cloth after drop-cloth throughout the

chancel area....a pair of saw-horses, immediately right in front of the altar, and considerable debris everywhere.

And then as though that were not enough, after six or seven years we have found that our air conditioning units in these passageways sprang a leak on us, which also added considerable mess. So we gave a good orientation to our new Buildings and Grounds Superintendent, Mr. Conn, and kept Mr. Cofield on the run.

But I wasn't troubled overmuch, honestly I wasn't. I, with you, would like to see this place kept meticulously, but I realize realistically that this was a fact of life. And I wasn't troubled overmuch because of two reasons, which I think you ought to know:

One, I had all the confidence in the world that come yesterday morning, Mr. Cofield and the Altar Guild would do what had to be done, and you wouldn't know anything about this unless I were telling you.

The second reason why it didn't trouble me overmuch was that it occurred to me during the week that if our Blessed Lord, whom we honor in this place Sunday by Sunday, would have made a personal appearance when all this mess was here, honestly I don't feel He would have felt a bit uncomfortable. But rather with my mind's eye I could see Him walking down the aisle -- God's great Galilean -- not coming first to this pulpit - honestly! I didn't figure it out that way at all! Nor would I visualize Him going first to the altar, where we claim His presence in the Sacrament and toward which we direct our thoughts when we pray. I didn't visualize Him coming down this aisle and coming to the pulpit or going to the altar.

But honestly, I visualize Him very easily going over and standing alongside of Fred Gardner, a fellow member, the carpenter, and I could see Him putting His big strong tanned arm around Freddie and saying, "Freddie, how does it go? --

" . . . You know, Freddie, I was a carpenter once -- in fact for about 18 - 20 years that's about all I did. Tell me, Freddie, have things changed very much? Do people still lie and cheat? How about the material -- is it decent quality? And when you place an order, do you have any assurance that the delivery date will be on schedule? Freddie, how about those nails -- is it true the price of steel has gone sky-high? . . . "

...I think I can picture our Blessed Lord doing that sort of thing...mark you, and mark you well -- not going to the pulpit, not going first to the altar, but standing there, tall and handsome as all get-out, with all the manhood of God shining in His face, with His arm around overall-clad-saw-in-hand Freddie Gardner, the carpenter.

Well, that's my introduction to you, my friend, on this Labor Day as I come to preach to you a Labor Day Sunday sermon. You must never forget that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, most of the time He spent as a carpenter, not as a preacher. And all of this urges me to bring to your attention now two passages of Scripture which constitute the text for this sermon. I'll come to the text a bit later, but there are two passages of Scripture that as a Christian who is called upon to do a day's work, you ought to remember.

One . . . do you remember when He was twelve years of age, this carpenter's son, He went with His parents to Jerusalem, after the manner of those days, to keep the festival season of the Church. And then after three days Mary and Joseph came upon Him, somewhat annoyed because they honestly believed that He had contrived to cause them some kind of inconvenience. They were irritated. And when they came and took Him to task He replied very quietly and calmly, as much as to say, "Well why did you get exercised? Don't you know me by this time?" Oh, the classic expression is the Scriptural quotation: "Did you not know that I must be about my

Father's business?" - - - and from that point on, for the next 18 years, He went back to Nazareth -- to be about His Father's business? -- yes!

For almost the next two decades, how did He spend His time, this young man who said, "I am here to be about my Father's business"?

...walking around ankle-deep in shavings, that's what

He was doing when He was about His Father's business . . .

...with a hammer in His hand, and a saw, with a plane making smooth the yoke for the oxen, as He delivered it to Ishmael, the peasant who lived at the edge of Nazareth...or as He took the threshold for Joshua ben Israel in his new home by the village square . . .

This is the kind of thing He was doing -- day after day, week after week, month after month -- almost decade after decade -- being about His Father's business!

And then you must also remember this, that at 30 years of age that divine imprimatur came upon Him, and the Voice from Heaven was heard to say: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" . . . and up to this point He hadn't even preached a single sermon! But nonetheless, about His Father's business! Don't forget it.

This second passage of Scripture to which I call your attention before we come to the text may seem a bit unusual today because it refers to the Christmas season. Do you remember how there were certain men who were engaged in their occupation -- hear me and hear me well, my friend -- it was while they were engaged in their work that the glory of the Lord was revealed to them. And the shepherds, to whom I refer, having had this glory of the Lord revealed to them, in their work, went to Bethlehem-town, and after they beheld the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ the Babe, the Scriptures say: "They returned, glorifying and praising God." Returned to what? - - - returned to their day's

work! -- the kind of thing they had been doing before, the kind of thing they kept on doing till they died. It was there that the vision came, it was there that they continued to give honor and glory to God.

Now the text for this sermon. The text is the 31st verse of the 10th chapter of a letter that a tent-mender-turned-preacher wrote to some Christians who lived in the town of Corinth:

"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

-- that's the text. Let me repeat it:

"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Now understand this perfectly well, that this text was being spoken or written not to a group of young men who had just entered a theological seminary, or to a group of men about to be graduated from a theological seminary. These words were not being addressed to a convocation of preachers who had had holy hands set upon them and then they were set aside to do holy work. These words were not spoken to such people. Nor were they spoken to such people as a convocation of Directors of Christian Education and full-time Christian service, or missionaries, or deaconesses, or church musicians, or parish workers. These words were written to people such as you! Not to be ordained, not to the consecrated, in the formal sense . . . to those who went about their day's work, whatever it was. And the Apostle Paul says to them: "Now whatever it is that you are doing, make sure that you do it to the glory of God."

Now I rise to stand before you this morning to ask you the question: Are you comfortable with this text? Can you as a Christian honestly believe that your day's work is something that you can offer to God's honor and glory?

I know ~~that~~ I'm the envy of some of you people, I'm fully aware of that, and I try to react, respond in a very wholesome way. I know that some of you envy me because I'm absolutely happy in my work. I couldn't be happier! And some of you envy me because I happen to be in a place where I am very happy

that I am. I can say to you right now, with the conviction that God places upon me, as of this moment there is no other place in this fair world where I'd rather be -- as far as fulfilling a sense of responsibility to God is concerned -- there is no other parish I'd rather shepherd.

-- Some of you envy me, some of my colleagues envy me, for being that happy in a particular parish.

Some of you envy me because I can honestly believe when the day is ended, no matter how long or demanding, that as God gives me strength, I am investing it in people. And in the sight of God there is absolutely nothing more important than people -- for whom He gave His precious Son to suffer and to die and to guarantee eternal life. This is what I am about with all the strength that God gives me, naturally proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

So my heart goes out to some of you who can't have this same measure of gratification regarding your day's work. My heart goes out to any man who has to drag his feet, my heart goes out to any person who can't wait until Friday comes and then says, "Friday -- thank God!" But there are people like that.

And sometimes their situation like that is primarily because they can't believe that what they are doing is something that's being done to the honor and glory of God. When a man is properly motivated, he's constantly gathering strength, and courage, to fulfill his day's work. Well, here's the motivation for the Christian, my friend -- do it to God's glory, whatever it is.

John Oliver Nelson has posed four questions which any Christian should take seriously regarding his day's work:

-- Is what I am doing in my work the most important thing I can do with my life in present circumstances?

Now that's quite a question.....Is what I am doing in my work the most important thing I can do with my life in present circumstances?

That's far more serious than you may care to admit, and I don't want to alarm any one of you. But I also know that none of us has a guarantee on tomorrow -- every one of us knows that life could run out for him at any given moment. Now because this is true, then it is incumbent upon us to endeavor to do the kind of work that is fulfilling, and satisfying, for we have no guarantee for any protracted period of time beyond the present moment.

The second question, says John Oliver Nelson, which needs to be reckoned with as a Christian:

-- Does my vocation, my job, my work, take the best I have to offer of skill and will? -- that is, does my job give me an opportunity to employ, to fully utilize my motivation and my endowments or my expertise?

Happy is that man who finds himself in that situation. For God is a great Task-Master. God always wants the best from us. God is never content at settling for second-best.

The third question:

-- Does my vocation, my job, my work, allow me to treat all persons as children of God?

And if any Christian finds himself in a position where he cannot look upon any person who comes to him as a child of God, then he is ~~not~~ in a vocation that's less than Christian. For in the sight of God we are all equal. And in the sight of God every Christian is called upon to exercise love to every single person that he encounters, and to give him the due and proper regard which he deserves as an object of God's love.

Long before this whole business of civil rights, long before this whole business of equal opportunity, the Pauline admonition and other Scriptural injunctions

command the Christian to treat all in his day's work as objects of God's love.

The final question:

-- Is my vocation, my work, my job, such that I can
pray about my job on my job?

Now that's quite a test. Whatever your day's work, can you talk to God about it? I don't want to embarrass anybody, but I have had people come to me and say, "I just can't tell my mother about the kind of work I'm doing now"....and I know full well what he meant when he said it -- it would be embarrassing to think that a son of hers would be giving his time and his energy for something that would not bring honor and glory to the family name or to the name of God!

And by the way, if you want an acid test as to the integrity of your Christian vocation, you can rest assured that your job is pleasing in God's sight if it's improved the lot of your fellow-men. If there's anybody who is any better off in this world because of what you happen to do in your day's work, then your job is bringing honor and glory to God. Is your day's work such that when you pray about it you can honestly ask God to give you the strength and the courage to do it? And even though in your day's work you may find yourself backed to the wall because your integrity is being put to the test, you have a right to ask God to help you stand up to the measure of a man.

Now...take some comfort in this, will you? For almost 20 years He was a carpenter. The point needs to be remembered -- the Christian serves his Lord in his day's work. Let's look at Jesus and try to understand. He was for nearly 20 years a carpenter in a village shop. It is incredible to think that for all those years He was just putting in time! -- waiting to begin His religious work. Now let the poet guide us:

" What was He doing all that time?
From boyhood then to early prime?
Was He then idle, or the less
About the Father's business? . . "

I am told that in the entrance to the impressive National Council of Churches Building on Riverside Drive in Manhattan, that there is a beautiful hand-carved wood sculpture. The carvings are figures representing 19 different occupations, with the same group in the face of the tree. There is remarkable character in the face of the postman...the tailor...the fisherman...the scientist...the teacher...the students...the butcher...the doctor...the nurse...the businessman...the housewife...the secretary...the farmer and his wife...the carpenter...the steel-worker...the minister. And underneath the mural there is an inscription. What do you suppose it is? Of all things, it's the words of this morning's sermon text: Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Now, one final word if you don't mind. As some of you know, on occasion I have sat with pulpit committees from other churches. Sometime the demand has been very pressing. I remember not long ago as I sat across the table from a member of the pulpit committee, he said, "There's one thing I want to make clear to you, Pastor. I, in company with other colleagues, are caught up with this whole business of atomic fission. Our day's work is related to the nuclear age. And some of us have difficulty in trying to find the God-dimension in this business. Pastor, come to us -- preach to us -- teach us -- be our Pastor! Help us to see the God-factor in our daily work."

I did not respond to that call to be their pastor. I continue to be your Pastor. But I remain haunted by his words. Many a Sunday when I walk away from this pulpit, or when I have had conversation with you privately, I ask myself the question: Did I deal properly with that person regarding the God-factor in his daily work? This is where it matters a great deal. The world may not judge you so much by what happens here on a Sunday morning, but God's world, for whom He gave His Son to die, will judge you seriously, how you behave in the arena of your day's work.

Now some of you know me, and you know that I live constantly under the thought of Judgment. I'm not fatalistic when I tell you that some day time will run out for some of us. This whole pageant of life on this earth for us will be over.....and then I do think in terms of confrontation with the Judge, the Eternal God who is the Lord and Giver of Life. And in that moment I think I know the question He'll put to me:

" - - - While on earth, what in Heaven's name did you do? . . . "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AND ALWAYS THE ENEMY"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from his Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The name is Rockefeller. Let's go beyond Nelson to John D., Jr., all the way back to John D. himself, reputed, as you well know, to be the richest man in the world at one time. Now listen to this: the first young woman to capture John D. Rockefeller's heart turned him down cold, because her mother looked askance upon a man who at that time had nothing but a dismal prospect for his future.....how wrong can one be?

Some years back a theatrical agent had a chance to hire and to book a female singing trio for thirty dollars a week each, a package deal of ninety dollars for the three of them. He turned it down. He said to the girls, "You just don't have it -- you won't make it!" Since then the Andrews Sisters have netted more than twenty-five million dollars.....how wrong can one be?

When Enrico Caruso, the golden-voiced tenor, first expressed an interest in music, his voice lacked volume and timbre. His first music teacher told him, "You haven't any voice at all! -- in fact it sounds like the wind in the shutters."how wrong can one be?

One afternoon a school teacher visited in the home of one of her seven-year old pupils. She said to the mother of the pupil, "I don't like to tell you this, Mrs. Edison, but I sincerely believe that your son Tom is mentally retarded."how wrong can one be!

Henry Ford one time announced the plans for his Model T. A man by the name of Walter Flanders, a financier, came to him and said, "Man, you're crazy! This

new plaything of yours won't sell!" More than fifteen million Model T's were marketed.....how wrong can one be?

....Chauncey DePew, a leading railroad executive, warned a relative of his not to invest a single dollar in Ford Motor stock, observing, "Nothing has come along that can beat the horse."how wrong can one be!

Some years back we said to ourselves, if we can only build finer and better schools, provide a facilities with better equipment, get more people who receive formal education, then crime will disappear from the streets and a new order will be ushered in. So we hoped that just programming education itself would be a panacea.....how wrong can one be?

We said to ourselves, if only we can build greater armies, strengthen our defensive arm on land, on the sea and in the air, then we'll guarantee peace in every segment of the world. Some of you within the hearing of this voice have lived through four wars, and all during that time we built for ourselves greater armies and developed greater weapons for defense, thinking that as we programmed for defense, we could make a world secure and peaceful.....how wrong can one be?

We said thanks to our advancing technology, we will build greater cities, usher in a new civilization, only to discover that we had the problem of ecology on our hands, the pollution of our waters, of our earth and of our air.how wrong can one be?

With all the strength that I can command as I stand at this sacred desk, I remind you that once upon a time, as a matter of historical record, there emerged from a little-known town and village a man who had been a carpenter's apprentice. And He went up and down the land that was so precious to Him, engaging people in conversation, talking to them about love, talking to them about the God-factor, introducing into their weary lives the promise of God's peace. There were those who said He had a demon, there were those who took

Him outside a city wall and nailed Him to a tree....how wrong can one be?

Now as I return to this desk, it so happens in the calendar of the Church, as previously referred to, it's Saint Michael and All Angels. Saint Michael, you see, is the chief contender in behalf of God against the force of evil. For angels, don't you forget it, are always God's representatives, God's messengers -- that's what angels are. Substitute for angels the word "God's representatives -- God's agents"....and you have it. That's what angels are!

Don't let the thought of angels trouble you. And what are Saint Michael and the angels about but to do battle against the force of evil. So as I return to you on this Sunday in this pulpit, I am constrained to do my best to interpret for you, to share a thought or so about the text which comes from the Gospel for the Day. And if it's a title that you want for the sermon, settle for this, will you? -- "And Always The Enemy."

The text, the 18th verse of the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke -- the words of our Blessed Lord, strikingly enough these words:

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

Let me tell you without any hesitation, I am numbered among those who believe in the fact of the Devil. Now there are those, even wearers of the cloth, who would part company with me at this point. Not all who go to a sacred desk believe that there is such a thing as the Devil. I am not one of them. I do believe in the fact of the Devil, I believe in the reality of evil. Let me state that for you very clearly.

And if you were to ask me, as well you should, "Why, Pastor, do you believe in the fact of the Devil and in the fact of evil?" -- I would have to answer you immediately by saying, "I believe in this because our Blessed Lord did!" Jesus Christ believed that there was such a thing as the Devil -- He even called him by name! -- He even carried on a conversation with him. Now I'll warrant you

that this may be done in poetic terms, I'll grant you that in some people's understanding of this, this is done symbolically. But human as we are, we work within such limitations, we interpret basic truth poetically, and sometimes it's better because we use poetry and imagery and symbolism. But the fact remains that Jesus Christ believed in the Devil, the fact of the Devil.

To say that He did not believe it would be to discredit the very foundational chapter in the beginning of His ministry. You may remember as He received the divine imprimatur, when the voice from Heaven said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" - - immediately thereafter He went into the wilderness and did battle against the Devil. When He was offered one alternative after another, one option after another, each of which would be less than the kind of path that God His Father had marked for Him.

Evil is the second-most-powerful force in the world. So I believe in the fact of the Devil, I believe in the reality of evil because our Blessed Lord did.

Secondly, if you were to press me, as I wish that you would, I would be constrained to say to you, I believe in the fact of the Devil, I believe in the reality of evil because I see the evidence of it! One can find the footmarks of those who are hell-bound -- anywhere -- everywhere. Now I fully recognize that some time ago, some generation or so ago, we started saying that there is no such thing as the Devil. It was no longer fashionable to believe in the fact of the Devil. And when that happened we began down-grading the fact of evil. But the Devil is doing very well, and doing very well by himself, gaining recruits daily. And while we take some comfort in the fact that there is a Jesus Movement about, that there are people who are re-discovering Jesus, but by the same token, would you believe it! -- there are people who are re-discovering the Devil! There are cults of the demonic, who are growing.

Did I not read from the quiet of the hills of home, when I picked up the

paper, to discover that in Cambridge, Maryland a murder has been committed by those who say that they were worshippers of the Devil? If you would travel to Los Angeles, you would find a company of believers who gather together in a place of worship. Interested in the name of the congregation? Brace yourself, my friend -- it's the Church of St. Satan.....and they've developed a ritual by which whenever they come they give praise and honor and glory to St. Satan. LOOK Magazine, now defunct, of August 24, 1971, had the pastor of St. Satan's Church saying, "The Devil is not to be exorcised - - - He's to be exercised! There is a demon in every one of us. Express him! Give him a chance to show himself. Let him be free!"

For those of you who did see "Rosemary's Baby," you may remember that the end, so I am told, the witch leader cries triumphantly, "God is dead! God is dead, and Satan lives. The year is One, the first year of our Lord, the year is One. God is done!" That's fiction. But what isn't fiction are the words of the Satanic group who believe that evil is to be exercised.

Now I'm not saying this to you this morning because I want you to believe in the old-fashioned notion of the Devil - - - pitchfork, red-clad, horns and tail. You can thank John Milton more for that than you can the Scriptures, of course. But I am here to say to you that C. S. Lewis in his "Screwtape Letters" masterpiece that it is, was absolutely right when he said that the Devil knows a measure of delight on either of two counts, or both: one, when people say that he doesn't exist; or by those who become pre-occupied with him in a morbid sense; or perhaps begin to worship him and deify him. I don't know where you may be in either of these camps, but if you're inclined to be numbered among those who would ignore his existence, or deny the reality of evil, I say to you, you're in for trouble. For no matter where you may go, no matter where you may look, there is always the enemy.

In the three weeks when I have been away from you, I found little time to read. There were other things that demanded attention. But I did read two books -- a charmer, some of you may recognize -- David Grayson's "Adventure in Contentment." And the other: a child's story book of the Bible. You see, I do have precious moments occasionally that I can spend with Lester Olinger's grandsons! And they're still at that stage when they cherish the telling of a story, and I felt it was high time that I built up my stock, so that when I did tell them a story I wouldn't find myself repeating. So I read from cover to cover this child's story book of the Bible -- all the way from Genesis to the Book of Revelation.

As I read that book I discovered all over again how God always had the enemy on His hands. He'd get the Children of Israel stabilized for a while, then they'd become corrupted in the next generation. There was always the battle to fight. And I was surprized to discover how much of it is made in the name, in the New Testament -- how Jesus Christ himself was always telling people about evil, and how they'd have to do battle against evil. Well, as I return to you this morning, this sermon deals with twin truths:

One, trying to get you, as I would say to myself, to appreciate all over again the fact of the Devil and the reality of evil. I had my moments when I reflected upon my parents, visited their grave, went back to my home town, in the time that I have been away from you. Far be it from me to fault them -- God forbid, these people of blessed memory to whom I owe so much. With every waking moment that God might give me I could never repay what they gave to me. But if we did have a chance to sit down, my parents and I, and we could talk about the things that I wish I might have had earlier, I think I would say to them, "Maybe you should have told me a bit more about the Devil....maybe you should have warned me repeatedly about the fact of evil!" For when I look back over the days of my years, I discover here and there a

jolting experience, when I had to recognize the fact that I was doing battle against the Devil, I was wrestling with evil. And I say to you, honestly now, it takes a bit of doing to recognize evil for what it is!

With all the compassion that I can muster, I see how much we might have been saved on the national scene in recent years, if only those who were in high places had been sensitive enough, or willing or able enough, to recognize the corruption of their integrity -- it might have been staved, and we might have been saved a great deal of grief. But it takes a bit of doing to recognize evil for what it is.

It's not always with an ugly head, you see, it can be most attractive. It can be most expedient -- despite its damnable nature. And it is only afterward that we look back and then see how ugly it really was! Well I say to you, this is a twin-truth sermon. The first of the truths is that the second-most powerful force in the world is evil. School yourself to recognize the fact of the Devil.

And the second truth, and the most wonderful, is this: the most powerful force in the world is the force of good -- the love of God, and the truth of God.

The Gospel lesson begins in this fashion:

"I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven."

You ought to know why our Lord spoke those words. Well, this is what happened -- it's interesting. The seventy apostles had been given their first assignment, I think. They'd gone out to preach and to teach and to heal, and to witness. They were gung-ho for it. And then they came back for a report session -- and all excited they told Jesus of all the wonderful things they were able to do, all the people who were blessed, whose lives were transformed and strengthened anew. And this was our Blessed Lord's response -- great day, this is the way He responded when they told Him these wonderful things -- He

responded simply by saying: "I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven."

- - for this is what had happened, you see. They had unleashed a bit of the good of God in the world, and the force of evil was being defeated. Goodness was prevailing in people's lives because of them. Truth was in the ascendancy. And people were committing themselves to the way of love. And because this had happened, Jesus said, "Now I see the Devil being defeated" Remember it, won't you?

I don't mean to be a prophet, but because I love you, and because I know you as well as I do, and because I know myself as well as I do, I'm quite certain that within the hour, or even before the benediction will be pronounced, you may encounter some element of evil. The Devil has you on his calling list. And he tailors his approach according to your personality. What may be vulnerable in me may not be vulnerable in you, but he knows what's vulnerable in you. And he plays his hand accordingly. If it doesn't happen today, it may happen tomorrow.....always the enemy!

~~But~~ But a sermon can't conclude on that note - - always the power and the grace of God, and the availability of the Holy Spirit to enable you to withstand the Devil. Jesus Christ was echoed by the Apostle Paul who said, "We wrestle against such powers and against such principalities." Ask the Holy Spirit to make you sensitive to evil when it comes, and ask God to make you humble enough to receive His strength to overcome.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"PRAISE YE THE LORD"
("SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT")

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

If Spring is the season for hope, then surely Fall is the time for nostalgia. And some of us, as we come to this particular time of the year, find ourselves looking back and remembering other days in other years. As for myself, so, I suppose, as long as the student remains in my heart, will be the time when, as youngsters going off to school, the day after Labor Day, we looked forward to our first break in the school calendar. It came in mid-October -- the time for the annual county-wide Teachers' Institute.

Usually it came on a Thursday and a Friday, which meant we had a short week. And all of our teachers and educators went to the largest auditorium that the county could boast, and for two days they met together. They had quite a program. They'd bring in people from near and far.

As for myself, I also remember those days in my first parish when I was invited to participate with two others, to have something to do at the beginning of each session. My responsibility was to bring a devotional or inspirational address. The other two people were, of all things, charged with the responsibility to lead those hundreds upon hundreds of teachers in group singing. For, thought the program committee, if we can get these teachers, independent as they are as individuals, just to sing together, then we might be able to get them to think together, we might be able to get them to work together.

The team that they had called in to perform this responsibility was from Pennsylvania State University -- a most unusual combination. I dare say I've never met any two people quite like them. How they could get those people to sing!

And they did it quite masterfully. The one chap was at the keyboard ...the other fellow went to the microphone. I had never heard such singing as I now recall from that day in yesteryear. But how did they go about it? Upon reflection, I think I know their secret. The chap at the piano just simply gave, without pounding, plain positive melodic support. The fellow at the microphone hardly if ever raised his voice, and with a minimum of gesticulation got them to sing.

As I say, I've never heard people singing before. The secret? That chap at the microphone said something to this effect: "We're all here this morning, and we all want to sing." - - - and all the time he was making these brief remarks the fellow at the keyboard punctuated what he was saying with restrained embellishment. But by the sheer force of his integrity and the strength of his personality, he spoke quietly, confidently, persuasively - - telling them that they could sing because they had something to sing about! And that was the gist of it -- as simple as all that -- and then they sang. But only, mark you, as they were reminded that they had something to sing about.

I'd like to think that Saint Luke Church is a singing congregation. I'm doubly pleased in the fact that ours is a congregation that places a high priority on the ministry of praise. That we might never forget it, we write into our schedule at the very beginning of the year, in the Fall season, this Sunday in October when we ask all of our choirs to participate in one way or another before the day is ended. Because we place such a high priority on the ministry of praise, are you aware of the fact that the most important single piece of equipment that we have, by way of price-tag, will be our newly re-built, enlarged and refined organ.

Martin Luther, bless his soul, placed such a high value upon the organ that he referred to it as the "second pulpit." We might have the mightiest

of all instruments known to the mind of man to lead us in our ministry of praise. I think if you were to study the budget you might discover, much to your amazement, that dollar-wise we spend more to support and advance the ministry of music than we do the cause of Christian Education. I wouldn't want to be associated with a congregation that couldn't give a proper emphasis to leading people in the ministry of praise. But if we are to do it, we've got to keep reminding ourselves that we have something to sing about! And only as you remember that you have something to sing about will you find yourself singing.

I've told some of you before, I remember so very well the transformation that took place in a certain young man's personality -- how I could hear him coming around the corner, how I could hear him going up the steps to his bedroom -- whistling, singing....something had happened to him. He had met someone who made all the difference in his life....and it gave him something to sing about and something to whistle about.

Now the text for today's sermon, brief as it may be, is from the Book of Psalms, the 146th in fact, verses 1 and 2:

"Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord. I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. "

Sounds crazy, doesn't it? Here is a man, a rare person, who says that as long as he has breath, the most important thing that he wants to do in reality is to give God praise. He's an exception. You may not wish me to tell you this, but we have a way of conditioning ourselves, we Christians, when we come to worship. Because we enjoy being with one another as much as we do, and because we enjoy doing the kind of thing as much as we do, that is, giving God praise, we sometimes assume that other people are like that. Well that's not true. There are more people in this world who don't acknowledge

God as the source of all goodness than people who do. We are a minority.

And occasionally when people who don't much think about God begin to think about Him, they complain, and they doubt Him and take Him to task for something that's gone wrong. Lawyers have a very pious-sounding phrase that they use in their legal documents. They call it "Acts of God" -- when something terrible happens, something tragic....a volcanic eruption...a tidal wave.....an earthquake -- some awful aspect of destruction. They don't blame man. They call it an "Act of God."

And on the other hand, there are any number of people who, when everything goes well, they take credit for it. It's a rare person who says, "I'll praise God for all of His goodness."

Well if you're going to praise God, you have to be the kind of a person who knows that you have someone to praise and something to sing about. Now just as that very capable chap stood at the microphone and got those people singing by reminding them -- in a very brief way -- that they could sing because they had something to sing about....in the few minutes that remain for me in this brief meditation, I am in duty bound to remind you, my friend, that you can well afford to sing because you have something to sing about.

As an example: there is a God who loves you -- there is a God who continually loves you. Some folks don't know that. Some folks don't believe it. Some folks don't claim it. We do. God is -- not, God was. But God is. And we know something of the basic nature and character of this God who is.

When I was a student in college, so sophisticated were we that we began talking about God in highly knowledgeable terms. And I remember how some of us used to say, "Well what about that fellow who says he believes in God as Creator, but doesn't believe in Him now?" And then we dealt with that fellow -- the kind of a man who believed that God was like a watch-maker -- masterminded

the parts, designed them, manufactured them, put them all together -- that's the way, he said, God made the world. And then, in the fashion of a watch-maker, having put it all together, having wound it up, having heard that it began to start, operate, running.....put it on the shelf and walked away. There are some people, limited people, who go that far -- yes, there was a mastermind, there was a creator, but they just can't get themselves to believe that that same God has a continued and personal interest in every single one of us. Now you and I believe that. And that's something worth singing about.

This same God also says to Himself, that His love for us is so great that He's not going to stand by idly and let us go to hell. This same God said, "I will do everything I can to keep them from going to hell - - I will intervene - - I will give them a Saviour. I'll do it myself." Now that's something worth singing about, that you and I can have the blessed assurance that sinners though we may be, we are sinners who are being saved.

And then God made us, and He loves us, and by His Holy Spirit He brings us together. Whether you realize it or not, every single one of us is receiving something from every other person who happens to be here right now. It may be a nuance, it may be a subtlety, but it's happening. You are absolutely insensitive, I say to you, if you can't appreciate the fact that some good thing is coming to us by the grace of God because we have been thrown together -- at a particular place, at a particular time, for a particular purpose. And together we're all receiving the same blessing. You and I are made strong by what God gives us through the Holy Spirit in His church. These are things worth singing about! - -

-- God is

-- God loves us

-- God Himself came in the form of Jesus Christ,

fully revealed, to save us from our sins.

And if that isn't something worth singing about, I don't know what is.

Small wonder, then, they call it singing the songs of the redeemed. That's why we can have the peace of God which passeth all understanding, to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING LATELY?"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

If you don't mind, let's begin with a bit of "in-house" conversation.
We Lutherans, let's admit it to ourselves, are quite a people. We boast
of many things, really we do. We take some measure of pride in saying
that we are the world's largest body of Protestants - -

- - with tongue in cheek, albeit we do a bit of strutting,
we point to the fact that we are the so-called established
church in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark . . .

- - we like to think that we are all of Christendom's
conscience regarding the proper balance between Law and
Gospel.....and we harp away on it so much that we do gain
some distinction among other groups for this very thing . .

- - and when it comes to the Reformers, we keep our man
Luther on quite a pedestal. We sing his praise for so
much -- good preacher....able teacher....marvelous pastor
....hymn-writer.....translator....polemicist....none, we
say, could be his equal as a protagonist for the pure Gospel.

Now today in the calendar of the Church we celebrate the Festival of
the Protestant Reformation. And we Lutherans claim a large share of credit
for what happened in that 16th century. But now I say to you as strenuously
as I can, and with all the ardor that my soul can command, be careful! - for
you see, there is a tendency on our part to think that all the abuses of the

Church have been corrected, that because Martin Luther was able to stand as brilliantly as he did, that he accomplished in that moment everything that needed to be accomplished. You and I have to be very careful lest when we come today, that we cast ourselves in the role of a spectator, and we look back to that arena of the 16th century -- do our rooting for our forces in the field -- thank God for our warriors, then walk away saying the battle has been won, the war is over, the chapter is closed....and that's that.

I say to you this morning, that as we celebrate the Reformation, this is not a time for self-congratulation. It serves its purpose best by reminding us that reformation is not a once-and-forever deal. It is never fully understood except as an ongoing process. Hence the text for this sermon, and I suggest to you that it would be hard to find a more sobering text than these words of the Apostle Paul:

"I pommel my body," said he, "and I subdue it,
lest after preaching to others I myself should
be disqualified . . ."

Note the qualifying phrase:

"Lest having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified."

You see, it could have happened to him. He had quite a thing going for himself. You remember, don't you, his dramatic conversion. Word of it spread like wildfire. He was the Number One Christian of that day, and wherever he went, after a brief period he was acclaimed, he was recognized. He established any number of congregations, he settled any number of cases of dispute among the congregations, he wrote any number of letters - - - let me say it again, wherever he went he was the Number One Christian of the Church in that day. And he could have permitted himself to believe that he had it made! he had arrived! But not so the Apostle Paul. He's the one who wrote these words,

using that apt figure of speech: "I pommel my body - I exercise vigorously -- I keep myself under control, lest having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified."

Now I come to you to this sacred desk this morning to remind you of this awesome truth - - nothing is ever completely won. The battle has to be fought over again repeatedly. Let me give you a very simple illustration...

...if I wanted to be this kind of a preacher, I could give you an exercise right now, I could say, "Everybody present please take a deep breath"....then I'd say, "Hold it . . ." Now you know what would have happened if we would have gone into this exercise right now, and you would have been so submissive that nobody gave you the word to release it -- you'd get blue in the face! You just don't take a deep breath and let it sustain you from that moment on. In fact, I could ask you a question right now, and while I'm asking the question and wait for you to answer, you could be doing something at least three times and be absolutely unaware of it, that is, simply breathing. At least 18 times every minute you breathe....1080 times an hour.....25,000 times a day you breathe - - - because you have to renew your breath. You just can't breathe once and let the day take its course. A basic principle of life is that nothing remains won. Anything worthwhile needs to be renewed.

I have my measure of impatience, as do you, of course, with commercials, because of what they imply, or because sometimes they deal in half-truths. I get irritated with one that advertises siding for a house -- not that I'm against aluminum or steel siding, don't misunderstand me, but I do argue with the implication when they say: NEVER NEEDS PAINTING -- as though they are suggesting, you see, that it never gets dirty, it will always remain clean.

Well, nothing ever remains clean! The farmer who had the post at the gate, who took pride in the fact that around his farmhouse was the easily-detected white fence - - - you could call it that because he kept painting it repeatedly -- it never stayed white....it never stayed clean.

- - was it six or seven years ago when we moved from that bit of Eden at 9219 Manchester Road to the present parsonage of Saint Luke Church at 919 Highland Drive -- we were advised to have a termite inspection before we moved in. The Property Committee wisely arranged for it. We were told that there were termites, and they brought the necessary treatment, and brought it under control. We were relieved, and we relaxed. We didn't have any more termite inspection . . .

. . . last week I walked into the walk-in closet where we keep our clothes in the master bedroom, and with my left foot it seemed to me that as I came down on that side of the room, that the floorings began to spring a bit. I called Mr. Conn, he came, he raised up a couple of boards, and there was a 2x8 joist -- the termites had had a field day! We get relaxed....we don't keep up the inspection.

Nothing ever stays won.

- - in the field of Education, they tell me, a PHD has a depreciable value within a ten-year period

- - one of the movements in the Church within recent times was what they call "continuing education" for all of its professional leadership -- you just don't get trained once, and then coast from that period onward.

Which leads me to say to you this morning, on this day, how current are you in your Christian commitment? How much vigilance are you giving to it,

regarding its validity and its integrity as of the present hour? Some of us don't admit it to ourselves, but we are Christians in the past tense. We look back and think of the day when we never missed Sunday School, and know a measure of pride because of it. We look back to the particular church in which we were baptized and confirmed, and recall it with profound satisfaction -- it did happen. And we think of something in the past.

-- some of us look back and remember what we did for the Lord Jesus Christ -- we taught Sunday School....we served on a committee -- all of it in the past tense, as though that in itself is enough to gain us passage to the very gate of Eternity from here on in.

You should be very happy indeed if you could look back to something that warms your soul and serves as a precious memory. But the Christian experience is always something more than a memory. It's an ongoing process, and it needs to be kept current.

Some time ago a man was asked to fill out a questionnaire in behalf of a man who was applying for a position. It happened to be a position in the church, and the question was a very important one: To your knowledge, what has this man done of any significance with his Christian experience in the past two years? How would you answer? How current are you with your Christian experience? I have to warn you, no one ever has it made! You see, this is one of the things that some of us lament on the national scene -- let me say it to you -- the disappointment that some of us experienced in some of our leaders who permitted themselves to think because they were in positions of great responsibility that they had it made! -- that they didn't have to keep a measure of vigilance regarding their own integrity and ethics and moral code of behavior. I am reluctant to tell you this, but I must say it to you,

no one ever has it made.

Some wit recently observed that virtue is a simple case of insufficient temptation, and just because you're moral today is no guarantee that you're going to be moral two months from now -- unless you keep yourself eternally vigilant, as the Apostle Paul said -- "under control -- in good shape spiritually." So this is why I come to you on this Reformation Sunday. It's easy to point with a measure of pride in all that they did to correct the abuses of the Church. But how current are we in this our day, with the responsibility that rests upon us?

John Calvin, you know, was one of the great Reformers of the Church, and he came up with the teaching that one doesn't fall from grace. Well, I don't know that I'd trust that if I were you. I'm willing to believe that God's love remains constant, that God doesn't disqualify Himself. But I think I've lived long enough to know that I could disqualify myself.

Let me encourage you to stay in there, my friend, to hold on. For the poet has said:

"Since by its fruit a tree is judged,
show me thy fruit, the latest act of
thine;
For in the last is summed the first,
and all. What thy life lays by heart
and soul into --
There shall I taste thy product."

. . . which is simply to ask: What have you been doing lately for Jesus Christ?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ANOTHER HARVEST - - "

EVEN in the listening to a sermon, we need the help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore enable us to better understand the interpretation of the text, and perchance some word may be spoken that will hold us in good stead, that we may live out the days of our years gratefully, and at the same time exercise a measure of responsibility. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

I presume it's safe to say that at least every church has one. We had one in that small church in which I grew up in that little Pennsylvania town -- able, committed -- I don't quite know how the church could have existed without her. She was given specific responsibility. But like as not, when she went about it she mumbled, and as she carried on this conversation with herself, there was no question, if you were within ear-shot, that she had decided opinions.

I gained the full benefit of it one day when on a Saturday like yesterday, in company with a couple of other youngsters, I was called upon to help her when she put together the display for the annual Harvest Home Festival. The members of the parish had brought their jars of canned goods, placed them up near the front of the Nave . . . then we youngsters, those of us who were there, we had to unwrap them from the paper, take them from the cartons, put them on the chancel level....and with that deft and skillful eye of hers, she choose this jar of red beets, that jar of green beans . . . she knew exactly where she wanted to put it on those shelves that were especially arranged for either side of the Communion table. And all the time, remember, I said she was a mumblor.

When the work was finished, really it was quite artistic, and anybody who came to church, as you've come now, and would look around you, could see visually

a reminder that it is by the Lord's hand that we are sustained. We have had another harvest time and we're grateful for what the fields have produced. And I can remember that beloved pastor of mine, in the announcement period, calling attention to what she had done, this particular woman and her committee, and in a very subtle way he'd thank her profusely and then intimate that we could count on her next Harvest Home to do the same thing . . . but she was a mumbler. And I heard her say underneath her breath, "I'm not so sure."

Well now, it wasn't that she had any misgiving as to whether God would give her another year, so that when next Harvest Home came around she'd be there. But you need to know what it was that caused her this irritation. She was quite sensitive, and when she arranged for the Harvest Home Festival she kept uppermost in her mind the original intention of the Harvest Home Festival. And something had happened the day before that jarred her. A newcomer in the parish, not being familiar with the procedure, had gone to the local grocery, Thomas B. Weaver, Quality Groceries, and had ordered a whole case of Libby's pumpkins, and they were delivered. And she couldn't quite see how a manufactured, processed can of pumpkins that came from an assembly line, prepared by somebody's hands that she never knew, whose names she'd never be able to learn, could really have any part in that Harvest Home Festival. And this irritated her, because according to her understanding -- and listen carefully -- whatever appeared so close to the altar was something that came from the garden plots in Montoursville which had been hand-spaded, and the seed had been sown by hand and the plants had been put down very carefully by hand -- somebody whose face that she could recognize had done the weeding, and the hoeing, and the cultivating.....somebody that she knew by name had tended the field, the garden plot, and had brought this produce in...

...this was the intention of the original Harvest Home Festival.

Only those things would grace the chancel that had come from the local

garden, as a tribute to Almighty God, that by His hand we are sustained and by His bounty we are continually provided. Bless her soul, she was so finely-honed with her sensitivities that she felt this was a violation of the spirit, this idea that anyone would bring to a Harvest Home Festival a can of Libby's pumpkins.

You know of course that it was quite a strain on the preacher and it required all the diplomatic skill that he could muster to go to the pumpkin-giver and tell her just why her cans did not appear in the display that Sunday morning!

Now all of this is by way of preface this morning. I have colleagues in the ministry who tell me that our observance here in Saint Luke Church of the Harvest Home Festival is anachronistic -- the day has come and gone when people do this sort of thing! How many garden plots did you tend this year?

...how much hoeing did you do? how many days did you limp back into the house with an aching back, because you'd bent over, hour after hour, and done the weeding?

...let me press the point as strongly as I can -- how many of you came today recognizing this Sunday as the Festival of the Harvest with a manner and a mood that characterized the ancient Jew, who when he first established the Festival of the Harvest, came completely mindful of those other years. He never quite got living in the desert out of his bones. He remembered what it was to pray constantly for manna from heaven by which he could be sustained, and when he came to the Festival of the Harvest, he was very much aware of the fact that it was by the Lord's hand that they were sustained.....He was the rain-maker, He was the Giver of Life.

Not very many of you have come this morning^d ready from the depth of your heart to acknowledge God as the Giver and Sustainer of Life.

It wasn't easy for Winifred, I am sure, yesterday when she came back from the grocery, the supermarket, to put the bread on the shelf -- it wasn't an easy

thing for her, farmer's daughter that she is, to say "Thank you, God, for this loaf of bread" - - - but to the contrary, an element of complaint that she had to pay as much as she did. She didn't first think of God when she took those ten pounds of sugar -- that's the way many of you are buying it these days, and then complain to me that she had to pay, what was it -- 43¢ a pound! It isn't easy under these circumstances to first say "Thank you, God" for what we gather from the fields, when our first reaction, if we have any reaction at all, is a measure of complaint.

Well it's against that kind of background that honestly now we do come to this place on a day when we mark the Festival of the Harvest. And I'm realistic enough to know that when my colleagues tell me that it's anachronistic, that maybe it remains in the calendar of Saint Luke Church because you happen to have a Pastor who does look back and remember the Festival of the Harvest of other years.

But what's going to happen when this congregation will have on its hands a generation of older people who cannot look back on the days of their youth, and remember how the vegetable plot was hand-spaded, and how what seemed like a tyrant of a father then in those days said, "No you don't! You don't go play until you first shake off all the bugs from the potato plants, or unless you've done your share of hoeing of those rows of corn . . . " What's going to happen then, when that day comes, shall we rule out the Festival of the Harvest, and then be the poorer because of it? Because come wind or weather, the fact will remain that it will always be by the Lord's hand that we are sustained, and God pity us when we forget. But if that should happen -- I want to shift gears immediately now -- if that day will come when we no longer grace the chancel and the windows and certain places around Saint Luke Church with the fruits of the earth, then let me serve notice that I would hope that as long as any man comes to this sacred desk in the years yet to unfold, that perchance at this time of the year he might

Speak on a Harvest theme. And if he can't, as I this morning, be surrounded by these fruits of the earth, then let him call the people's attention to another kind of harvest -- the harvest of the spirit. For as long as men breathe and live we'll always be able to refer to them and to certain seasons of their years as the springtime of their lives....as their summertide....and if God willing, an autumn if not a winter.

Now shift gears, if you don't mind, and let me talk about the necessity to think in terms of the harvest of the spirit -- if you're in no position to talk about the harvest of the fields. And there's a text, of course there's a text. It's from a letter that a man named Paul wrote to a group of Christians who lived in Galatia. You can read it for yourself, it's the 22nd verse of the 5th chapter of that letter:

"The spirit however produces in human life
fruits, such as these, love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,
tolerance and self-control."

The Apostle Paul is calling to our attention that down deep inside of every one of us there is a place where seeds are to be sown, and from which a harvest most certainly one day will be gathered.

Did it ever occur to you that this is what the Christian Church is really about? -- the sowing of the seeds of truth, and of love. The sowing of the seeds of the basic principles of morality. The Christian Church does this as no other group of people does it. It's our specialty.

That dear father ~~of mine~~ **of mine**, bless his soul, who always took pride in his garden, would wait for the arrival of all those seed catalogues, and I can tell you right now, when it came to ordering golden bantam corn, he always waited until the seed catalogue of a particular company came, because he knew they specialized in that, and from prior experience no other selection could quite match that! By that same token, I tell you, that while there are many agencies and institutions and groups

of people at work within this world -- none such as the Christian Church specializes in the seeds of love...joy...peace...patience...gentleness....kindness...self-control.

Have you ever permitted yourself to think that this is what we're really all about? Right now as we're gathered in this place, in the sessions of the Sunday School, what are they really doing but sowing seeds of love, and truth, and kindness, and patience, and gentleness -- sowing the seed of God's Word in the springtime of the lives of those who are young. Properly understood, did it ever occur to you that when you and I come to this place and the worship experience, and allow time for the preaching of a sermon. what do you suppose that sermon really is? - - it's an act of cultivation, it's an act of nurturing what has already been sown in your own mind and in your heart, so that some day it might bring forth good fruit. This is what preaching is all about. Let it be clearly said, it's an act of cultivating, it's an act of nurturing. And even in the Sacraments, properly understood, it's a measure of building around you a protective shield to keep you from the insidious elements that destroy you and eat away the very fibers of your soul.

I am also constrained to tell you that when you think of the harvest, you think of safely gathering in the result of other years. But did it ever occur to you that even the harvest needs to be protected? I can recall it so very well, and thank God for the memory - - somewhere in that garden plot that we had there was always a space reserved for the tunneling out and the putting in of that wooden barrel, in which we stored the celery, and apples, and the endive, to protect it when the frost came, to protect it even from some of the early winter snows, that it might be preserved.

A chap with whom I went to school, a summer or two ago when I went back home, with great measure of pride showed me the orchard that he now owns. And as we'd gone over the orchard and the trees, then he took me to the building that he had especially constructed - - he showed me the insulation on the inside walls...he

showed me the compressor....he showed me all the machinery so necessary so that when he harvests his apples in October, come April -- thanks to the moisture control, thanks to the fair amount of oxygen which is guaranteed so that those apples that have been so protected during those winter months, that they'll be just as crisp and fresh, presumably, as when he put them there in October. Which is simply to suggest to you, my friend, that I was tempted when I came to this sacred desk this morning to preach a sermon particularly for those of us who have reached what I might refer to as the "prime plateau in life." We're pushing 60, now, you see, the autumn of life. Not the winter, but the autumn. And now as we gather the harvest in, the necessity that remains upon us to protect what we've invested and what we've nurtured in other years. He was a wise man indeed who said, "I will not permit my biography to be written until after I have died, because I have seen too many men destroyed, not simply physically, but morally and ethically, before they ended their years."

One of the disgusting things that we've discovered in recent times is the deterioration, morally, of those whom we've trusted, and wanted to respect, in the prime plateau of their years. Nothing just ever happens automatically. Things need to be nurtured, cultivated, preserved and protected. And so I say to you with all the strength that I can command, let us, then, who are reaching the prime plateau, ask God to give us the grace, to remind ourselves that there are certain things that we just dare not do, lest love itself be cheapened and truth be defiled.

Towards the end of his life Charles Darwin said in one of his letters: "Up to the age of 30 or beyond it, poetry of many kinds gave me great pleasure, pictures gave me considerable, and music very great delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry; I have tried lately to read Shakespeare and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me; I have also almost lost my taste for pictures or music." Commenting on these facts, he adds, "There is a law of atrophy in the spiritual world. If I had to live my life again I would make it a rule to

read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week. For perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active from use.

If this is true of our sensitivity to music and poetry, it is also doubtless true of our sensitivity to the source of all beauty, goodness and love. Through neglect we may unconsciously become callous and insensitive to His spirit, if we do not keep alive our contact and if we allow other things in life to crowd out the finest and the highest, it is natural that other things will grow to seem more real than God."

....said the Apostle Paul: "The spirit also produces fruit."

May your harvest be good, and lasting.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NOW CONCERNING THE COLLECTION - - "

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

R.S. And now that you have been willing to do your part as far as
the length of the sermon is concerned, we'll do our part and omit
the introduction. Let's begin immediately, then, with the text.
But before the text is given to you, one needs to remember that the
purpose to be served in any sermon is three-fold:

- one, that the text might be interpreted;
- secondly, that the text might be applied to a particular
situation;
- and third, that the interpretation of the text and the
application may motivate you to do something.

Now the text - - from Paul's First Letter to a group of Christians
who lived in Corinth, it's the 16th chapter and the 1st verse:

"Now concerning the collection, upon the first day
of the week let every one of you lay by him in
store as God has prospered him."

Pastor, do you want to say anything right now before I go on?

D.R.S. Well it sounds to me, as you read the text, that
the preacher is talking about money, and I was wonder-
ing, as I read that text in preparation for this sermon,
back in the day when Paul preached that or wrote that,
how many people got up and left before he finished what
he had to say? Because some people, when it comes to

talking about money, feel a little uncomfortable.

R.S. Well there's not a matter of historical record as to how many people got up and left. I have an inclination to think, however, that nobody left. I'll tell you why I think so - - first, they had a high regard for the preacher, they trusted that man. And secondly, that congregation was made up of rather reliable stuff. And in addition to all of that, I happen to know from having studied this letter first-hand, that he said a great deal before he got around to this particular point. It's significant to read all fifteen chapters that went before this 16th chapter. You ought to read it for yourself this afternoon. Some people tell us that in no letter that Paul ever wrote did he say as many wonderful things about Jesus Christ - - in no letter that he ever wrote did he talk so much about the goodness and the love of God. It's in this letter, you must not forget, that Paul gave us that greatest of all ascriptions to love - - it's in First Corinthians, the 13th chapter, that he talks about love.

It's in this very same letter that he talks about Jesus Christ dying for us, arising from the dead. It's in this letter that he talks about all these wonderful things, as much as to say, We've got a grand and a good thing going for us! Now let's remember that we have something to do as a response to it!

Now can you understand, Pastor, why we can't ignore

this text? Can you understand the three points that can be applicable here: an interpretation of the text, an application of its truth, and an attempt to motivate the people who hear to some kind of action.

D.R.S. Well let me try at least, I think I can. I think it's because of the very same reason that Paul used it in the first place, because the very mention of it was an absolute necessity. The Christians in that day -- well for them the availability of money, the coin of the realm, the means of barter -- for them that was essentialit was basic....it was fundamental, and there was no other way of seeing that certain needs of the people could be met without laying the cash on the line, if you want to use that term.

As Christians those people had banded together, they had committed themselves to a particular life-style, and that meant certain obligations. And they were being challenged to practice what they professed, and that meant, then, that they'd have to use their hands for something other than folding them in a gesture of prayer. So from the very first time that Paul wrote this letter, I think he's saying that the spotlight is not only on a man's prayer book, but on his pocketbook. And there is something to be said about the fact that you can't separate a Christian from his money. The two do go together.

There's an illustration that you and I are familiar with about our Baptist friends, who, when there was one who was

about to be taken to the baptistry, after he said that he would be a new convert to Christ - - - can you tell us about that?

R.S. It was very vivid to us when some time ago we took two busloads over to the Upper Room Baptist Church, where Mr. Cofield, our chief custodian, is a deacon. And with pride he was showing us around the brand new plant, and then he showed us the baptistry. And you know, in the Baptist church you go down into an area where there is water and there you are baptized, you are immersed. And he was also very happy to show us the dressing room, and all of that brought back to mind the story that Pastor wants me to tell you.

Once the deacons were very happy that they had found a particular convert, and he'd gone to the dressing room and undressed and put on a special baptismal garb, and was going down the steps into the baptistry....when suddenly he turned around and went back! And the deacons presumably thought they were losing a convert, and they tried to restrain him, and they said, "Where are you going -- you stay here!" But he said, "I'm going back." "Well, what are you going back for?" And he said "I forgot something." And they said, "Well what did you forget?" "I forgot my wallet.".....and the deacons said, "Well you don't need that to be baptized -- it will be safe where it is." But he said, "You don't understand, my wallet is part of me, and it needs to be baptized too!".... ..and he was absolutely right! - - because you can't separate a person from his money !

And interestingly enough, you may not realize this, but somebody has observed that Jesus Christ talked more about money than He did any other particular subject. You can't separate a Christian from his money.

I have an admission to make to you -- I think I'll go to my grave, one, with an unsatisfied desire, and secondly, with some sense of fulfillment, God forbid that I should boast!

-- one, I'll go to my grave with an unsatisfied desire.

I have had my moments when I'd like very much to have been a millionaire - that's how much I think of money; -- and secondly, I think I will have some satisfaction when my days are ended in realizing that whatever money

I have had, I've thoroughly enjoyed sharing it...
...that's why I like money, to share it.

D.R.S. You mentioned the fact that Jesus frequently spoke about money, and I am sure that when He spoke about it He also tied it in with the thing that I think He possibly spent more time talking about than any other, and that was the relationship man has with God in the salvation of his soul. But this tied in with the way a man handles his money, and Jesus did speak frequently about it, and about people who didn't have it, about people who did, and what would happen to people who never mastered its use....and very definitely He spoke about people who were mastered by it. And He did such a good job of treating the subject of money that

one of His most ardent followers said one day that "the love of money is the root of all evil" . . . I had a philosophy professor in college who said, that's right, the love of money is the root of all evil - - and we're all in their rooting!

But Christians really can't afford to ignore the teachings of Jesus Christ about money, and I'm not implying for a single moment that Jesus had a certain disdain for it. The point that we need to clearly understand is that Christian discipleship at its best will inevitably include a vow of poverty -- the Gospels don't suggest that - - and Peter did keep his boats and his nets and his house . . . Zacchaeus, after he was converted, gave only half of his goods to the purpose of justice and mercy. And Jesus was very comfortable in the presence and the company of the publicans and the people of wealth of His day.

But He did mention about the danger that money can bring to a person. Remember how He said that it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it would be for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? But when you think in terms of the text, Paul's talking about the collection - - you can call it the offering, the gifts we bring before the altar.....he lays out some very specific guidelines.

R.S. Would you give us the first one?

D.R.S. Well, the thing that struck me about reading the text was the fact that he said, he begins with "for you"

and here I don't think he's making any bones about it, he's directing it to a particular individual. If the Apostle Paul were here today, I have a feeling he would say, "Now I'm talking about you . . . and I'm talking about you . . . and I'm talking about you. I'm not talking about the person sitting next to you, behind you, the one who is coming at 11:15, the one who was here at 8:30 - - but I'm talking about you, because the individual matters, the individual counts. And he wanted to make that impact on the people who were listening to him preach. He wanted to make perfectly clear that if anything was to happen for the cause of Jesus Christ, it will only happen as one individual after another makes it happen.

R.S. Pastor David, I'm inclined to think that this is one of the great problems of our day. There are so many of us. No matter where we go, we find other people. And you might as well know it, that when Pastor David and I have our deep and long discussions about Saint Luke Church, one of the problems we think we have to deal with is that because we have four services on any given Sunday, because we have a multiplicity of activity and interest, and because when you come as you came now, you find every seat in this place filled and people in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart - - you may be inclined to think that you as an individual are not important. And this is one of the great things we have to wrestle with: the individual is important! The secret of this church lies in the ability of each individual recognizing his obligation and his responsibility. Don't you

have something to say to this point that I was impressed with when you mentioned it at the earlier service, about what the New York preacher said about the individual?

D.R.S. It was Dr. Campbell, who was Pastor of Riverside Presbyterian Church who one time preached a sermon on the difference an individual makes in the world. He recalled for the listeners the fact that it was the individual, the one vote, that elected Thomas Jefferson President . . . it was one vote that authorized the construction of the Erie Canal . . . it was one vote that beheaded Charles the First of England . . . it was one vote that made France a republic, and it was one vote that put it to an end. And here too, again, just let me emphasize that it is the individual, it is that one person, who does make a difference.

Religion in American life is a concept that some business men in New York City, I believe, have had going for a number of years, where they've asked a particular ad agency on Madison Avenue if they would devote some of their time and services in the course of a year to help to bring before the American people the fact that, you know, religion is important, that one does need to respond to God. And this year's ad campaign, as I saw it, I think it was particularly appropriate - - there are a number of different illustrations and pictures that you may see appearing in magazines and in newspapers and on television ...and the underlying theme is this: I see a lot that needs to be done, I'm aware of a lot of things that need to be done. But I'm only one person. What can I do?

.....and then comes the little tag line underneath it. It says: Do You Really Think That God Is Going To Let You Get Away With That?" The individual does matter. And whatever happens begins right where you and I happen to be.

R.S. And if we were free to do it, we could write the history of Saint Luke Church at this moment in relating for you how the pace has been set and the course has been determined, when one person after another, acting as an individual - - I think of this very wonderful thing throughout this area, that merits the praise of all of us: Meals on Wheels -- because one person in this congregation perhaps more than any other, and eventually got a team-mate with her, kept persevering. . . . I think of the influence of Bethany in the life of this congregation -- one person perhaps more than any other is casting a lengthened shadow on all of us, and the influence that comes out of Bethany is spiritually transforming this place....I think of one person who came to me more than a year ago and said, "Pastor, you mentioned about praying for the entire congregation all by yourself, naming the families by name -- why can't we get a group to do that?" - - one person came forward and said that. Now we have over 120 people doing that sort of thing, guaranteeing that every single household is remembered in prayer, daily.

I couldn't help but be impressed when at the Fellowship Suppers, when in that very interesting interchange with questions and answers, when one question was raised: What do you think is the highest single contribution that's brought to the altar of the Lord every Sunday in Saint Luke Church? The feeling that I got was that people just couldn't believe that one man-and-wife would bring \$55.00 each week, and yet it's

happening. And that person has done it because all in all they recognize the responsibility of the individual to act responsibly. Now let me say to you, as I say to myself, that probably represents a tithe of \$28,000. Well now the Apostle Paul goes on to say, "Let each one of you, as God has prospered you, set aside for the collection - - " Well maybe you don't have a total income between your wife and yourself of \$28,000, but many people do in Montgomery County. Maybe yours is only \$14,000, then, between the two of you -- would you in your situation, then, bring an offering of \$27.00 a week? Or if you only had a family income of \$10,000, would you recognize the responsibility to act as an individual for a tithe of \$19.00 a week? It's the case where the individual responds -- freely -- earnestly....not waiting for anyone else.

Says the Apostle Paul, "On the first day of the week, each one of you do something - - " Tomorrow night, God willing, I'll travel to Westminster, Maryland, where I have been asked to deliver an address as they launch their 1975 stewardship appeal. What I will say to them I am not saying to you, just as the Apostle Paul did not write to the Corinthians in the same way that he wrote to the Galatians or to the Ephesians. He interpreted the text and then applied it to their particular situation. I'm saying to you here in Saint Luke Church, we've got a wonderful thing going for us in behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. Never have we had more members. Never, I like to think, have we had greater spiritual depth. From my vantage-point I am in a position to tell you that there are people whose lives are being changed, transformed by the grace of God. Never have we offered so much to so many, because of God's grace. Never have we had an earnest desire to limp along within our limited facilities, and at the same time increase and

expand our ministry to people.

Now to apply this truth, as every sermon ought to do -- to interpret the passage and to apply it to a particular situation. Here's the word, here is our need: in 1975, if we have to wrestle with the inflation factor, and there will have to be an increase in giving of 10, 12, 15% just in order to maintain the same level of ministry as we did last year. Do I have to say any more to you, since you yourself recognize what it means to you in your household? "On the first day of the week, then, let each one of you put in the collection as God has prospered you . . . " Now, Pastor, come in as you did at 8:30 and remind us, despite the inflation factor, when I complain to Winifred about high prices, she says, "But, Ray, don't you remember where we have been in other places of the world, we still have it better here than in any other spot on earth."

- - Pastor, speak quickly to us about our favored situation. Tell us - - tell us we are a people who deal, not with scarcities, but with extras.

D.R.S. Well, we could be labeled as people-of-extras when we think in terms of what we have come to know as God has prospered us, not only as a nation but as families, as a church. We think of the extras that we'll have even within a few hours -- when we sit down to a meal and we'll have our choices of dressings on a salad, for example....or instead of having just a potato and a piece of meat in front of us, we might have to make a choice as to the number of vegetables we are

going to have served with it, whether we'll have gravy or sour cream, and whether we'll take butter or margarine or jam with our bread....we look out our driveway, we might see an extra car or two....we look around the room and we might see a clock in this one, in the next room, and a clock in almost every room in our house...or an extra radio or television in other rooms of our house. We are a people of extras - - - God has prospered us. I'm just trying to react here very frankly as I listen to what's been said from the pulpit. And maybe it's the first time some of us have ever been talked to this way, in terms of support of the Lord's work.

But in the five years that I have been a pastor in this parish, I've never failed to be amazed at the way people respond when they are challenged, and the good that comes forth when people know the joy of getting involved and being supportive in one way or another. And I look throughout the congregation this morning and I see people that are in 7th grade, 8th grade, 9th grade, I see folks who are in senior high school, I see college students, I see parents, I see grandparents, I see people I've not seen before -- they are here as visitors, they're here as friends, they're here for the first time, perhaps they've just moved into the community. And when we think in terms of what happens in 1975 in the life and spirit of this congregation, to think in terms of setting priorities, perhaps even a part-job where our priorities lie in supporting the Lord's work, or know full-time job in our giving. Wherever we may happen

to find ourselves support the cause of Christ, wherever and however it may be expressed. Particularly now we're thinking in terms of this family in God, and as the multi-image presentation made throughout the week in our Fellowship Suppers in so many different ways, so many different facets, so many different styles - - it would make a difference if the individual did not respond.

R.S. Let's get back to the text, then, as we conclude. You remember "On the first day of the week" Paul says, -- take care of this -- give it a priority, as Pastor has indicated. A wit went into a book store and discovered there on display a book that they were promoting that week called "Magic With Leftovers" He happened to be a preacher, and he said to himself, this perhaps belongs more in the Religion Department than it does in the Culinary Department, because as a preacher he looked back over twenty years and he was convinced that the Lord does magic with leftovers. After we have taken care of everything else, then what remains perhaps we may think that we might designate for the Lord's work.

Now don't let that happen. Know the joy of giving out of whatever you happen to have. Pastor David and I want to thank you for the joy that comes to us in serving as a team. There's no other place on the face of this good earth where we'd rather be. And I'd like to think that as an individual member of the parish you feel that way about your membership. As the Apostle Paul said to those Corinthians -- "You've got a great thing going for you" -- (that's a free translation, of course) -- "keep it up!" As we look forward to 1975, God is saying to us -- You in Saint Luke have a great thing going for you -- keep it up! And especially as come January 14, 1974, you can thank God for your first 35 years, as we move in, then, to the remaining two-thirds of our first century.

(Transcribed as recorded) * * *

"SAINTS - - BEWARE!"

O GOD, We make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. We would like to make the most of it now, and that's why we ask for the help of Your Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

Tell me now, what you think is more important, the introduction to a story, or the conclusion? I have a friend who whenever she reads a book, is always thumbing the pages eagerly and looking to see the way the chapter ends, even before she's finished reading the chapter. There's no question in her mind as to which is more important. She's primarily interested in seeing how it's going to end.

Oh I ought to say this to you right away -- Jesus loved to tell stories, you know. In fact He was remembered for the stories that He told. Somewhere in the Good Book, if I'm not mistaken, reference is made to the fact that almost every time He stood up to preach He had a story to tell. We call them parables. Now if you don't mind, I'd like to give you a bit of advice when it comes to studying the stories that He told: don't take them at face value.

Good heavens! -- I hear you say -- what's come over our preacher this morning -- not to take at face value the stories that Jesus told! Well, I'm speaking to you out of my own experience, and I beg you now to remember the context in which you're hearing me tell you this. You will remember, won't you, how I happened to give you this bit of advice?

As I've studied some of the stories He's told, I've tried to make them stand on all four, and this doesn't always happen. The stories that He told were always told for a purpose, and sometimes that purpose is not crystal clear.

You'll have to probe a bit. You remember, don't you, that one time when He had told a story, some of His disciples were troubled by it and they wouldn't let Him get away, they detained Him until He explained the story for them, until He got beneath the surface. They were simply dealing with it at face value, and they ran into difficulty.

Take the story that Dr. Bentley read for us today as the Gospel:

" . . . Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican, or a tax collector. The Pharisee stood thus and prayed with himself, O God, I thank you that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as the publican, or tax collector. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican standing afar off would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote his hand upon his breast and said, God be merciful to me, a sinner. Now, said Jesus, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted "

Now if you take that story at face value, you're going to be in for some trouble.

As an example: Jesus, very cleverly telling the story, begins, capturing the imagination of His hearers by saying: "Two men - - " Not one man, not three people, but two. And immediately when He mentions two, you begin to think in terms of contrast or comparison. . .

...if you've gone to New York, and you've gone to Broadway, you've come back, you call your friend on the phone and said you saw two shows on Broadway...and immediately your friend is waiting for you to tell which of the two you liked better....

...if you have a friend who went house-hunting yesterday, and chances are when she gets back she may call you on the phone, and you're waiting when she's told you that she saw two houses, and you're eager to hear as to which one she liked better, or perhaps which one was better suited to her pocketbook....

...always, you see, when you mention two, you introduce the element of contrast and comparison.

So at face value, by way of contrast, here are these two men. And if you'll pardon the jargon, one's a good guy, presumably, and one's a bad guy.

At face value now, let's take a look at the good guy:

- - you've heard the generalization: "Everybody does it" - - well this man was happy to look out across the years of his own life and brands himself an exception. While there were many things that other men did -- he didn't.

...while some men cheat on their income tax - - he didn't.

...while some men default their employer - - he didn't.

...while some men cheat on their wives - - he never did.

"I thank you, God," said he, "that I am not as other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers . . . I fast twice in the week " --- did more than was expected of him!

" - - I give tithes of all that I possess . . " -- as a good Jew he was expected to tithe only the increase from his fields -- not so this chap! If he were living today we'd sing his praise, because he gave a tenth, not only of his pay check, but if he had investments, he'd tithe his dividends....if he got a bonus, he'd tithe that! . . . if someone remembered him in a will, he'd give 10% of what he received. His record was exemplary.

...if he were a member of Saint Luke Church, we'd probably write him up in a little booklet, and Dwane Yoder, Chairman of this year's Stewardship Committee, would say, "Pastor, if we only had a hundred like this man - - or I'd even sing a te Deum if we had 25% of his kind!"

...His record was enviable. . . . a good guy.

Take him now at face value, and see the trouble you're going to get into when you remember how the story ends.

Now on the other hand, by way of contrast, this other fellow, if you'll pardon the jargon again, he was a rascal! and he was a ripsnorter! He looked back over the days of his years, and he was a sinner, by his own admission and I presume by the admission of other people. He was an extortioner-of-sorts. He got a-hold of some political bureaucrat who got him a job -- he had a nice political plum. He was the tax collector for his area, and Rome said to him, this is the base that we expect you to return to us from your area, but whatever you get over and beyond it belongs to you!

...well the rascal, he took whatever the traffic would carry, he exploited his situation -- he was willing to grease the palm of the man who got him the job. He was a bad guy. He didn't have a very good record.

Now if you deal with this story at face value, what are you going to do now when Jesus concludes the story by saying, "I tell you that this one (the rascal) received my commendation.....and I tell you the good guy, by your records, gets my condemnation."

...well that's the story that Jesus told, and if you take it at face value you're going to run into trouble.

But now let's get back to what was said at the very beginning -- the introduction of a story is very, very important likewise. And for my money, I never want to read the story without going back and reminding myself again and every so often of the way the story began. It isn't simply what is said, but to whom this thing is said, and why it's said, gives meaning and substance to the story itself. Now the introduction:

" - - and to certain people who were self-righteous
and trusted in themselves, Jesus told this story . . . "

. . . because in the final analysis, Jesus Christ is not dealing specifically with the record of a man's achievement as He's dealing specifically with a man's attitude. In the sight of God, if I understand the mind of God aright, it's never simply what's done that matters most - - it's why have you done what you've done? . . . why did you fail to do what perhaps you should have done?

Take the attitude of the so-called good guy -- his attitude toward himself, his attitude toward God, and his attitude towards his fellow-man. Let's begin with the last one....

- - he never so much as pitied the other fellow, he never so much as concerned himself with any degree of responsibility as to that man's condition or circumstance. He never so much as figured out for himself, what might I be able to do to help him, that miserable wretch? Now that's not a very healthy attitude for any man to have toward anybody else....
- - take his attitude toward himself....as far as he was concerned, he had arrived! He had achieved something. He could look at other people and pat himself on the back. That's not a very healthy attitude. In the sight of God, I say to you with all the strength that my soul can command, no man ever arrives....in the sight of God, no man can ever say to himself, "Look, God, I've got it made!"
- - how his attitude toward God. You know what he was doing really now? - - he was exploiting the situation, he was using God as a listening post. He put God there so that somebody could hear the recitation of his goodness, the recital of his virtue. God doesn't exist for that purpose. And God doesn't exist for any man who can allow himself to believe that he can strut into the very presence of God. If you talk about a man's record, that's one thing. If you talk about his attitude - - that's something else! And the

attitude you discern only as you probe beneath the surface of the story.

Now as to the other character - - a man who couldn't as much as muster up one good thing to his credit. All he could do was say, "I am a sinner - - have mercy, God." Do I have to delineate for you the virtuous characteristics of this man's attitude? I haven't given you a title for the sermon, have I? I've thought of several that I could have put down:

"THIS MAN . . . THAT MAN"

I've thought of using this one:

"UPTURNED NOSE, AND THE BOWED-DOWN HEAD"

One that I'm constrained to use is: "SAINTS - - BEWARE!" - - for this is a sermon that's meant for us. We don't want to be hell-bent -- I know you that well. Your heart's desire is to go to Heaven, your heart's desire is to establish a good and enviable record. And every now and then you and I reach for our haloes, and we finger them, and we polish them, and we want God to look at them. Beware, my friend.

I have reason to believe that every one of us, before the day will be ended, will be talking with God -- I like to believe that about you. Some of you have done it already. I like to believe that you look upon Jesus Christ as your friend, that you'll be talking with Him. Be careful -- what you say! what you talk about! He has a way of listening!

" . . . and he spoke this parable to certain who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican, or a tax collector. The Pharisee stood thus and prayed with himself, O God, I thank you that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as the publican, or tax collector. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican standing afar off would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote his hand upon his breast and said, God be merciful to me, a sinner. . . . "

I don't know of anything more precious to the ear of God, aside from "O God, I love you" - - than the cry of the penitent. And that's the way the story ends because that's the way the story happened to have begun. * * * (transcribed as recorded)

"WHERE TWO OR THREE - - "

WE'D LIKE to make the most of this particular time together now, God, and that that should happen, we ask for the help of your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Any pastor who's spent at least a decade or so in the ministry is qualified to compile his own series of stories and incidents dealing with "CUTE AND CLEVER SAYINGS HEARD IN AND ABOUT GOD'S HOUSE." As you might know, with the slightest encouragement on your part, and even without it, I have been more than willing to tell you a story or two that I could include in the first pages of such a book, if I chose to write such a book: "Cute and Clever Sayings Heard in and About God's House."

The most precious of all the collection that comes to my mind is one that also serves as a very pointed illustration for today's sermon. It happened several years back, when a family had asked to schedule the baptism of their newest child; and after the third morning hour, when the family had gathered together with kinfolk and friends, and just as we were about to begin the baptismal service, one of the boys in that family - -

...oh, I think I should go back and tell you, in all likelihood he had been properly schooled and trained by his mother, that this was a very special event, and it was going to take place in a very special house --
God's House....

She had done her job far better perhaps than she had realized, as I tell you that just as the words were about to be spoken by the Pastor, the Pastor's eyes fell

upon this little boy whose eyes fairly popped as he looked at that door over there, the door nearest the baptismal font that leads to the passageway near the chancel. And then he blurted out - - "Is that the door where God comes out?"

...a childish remark of course, and you may brand it cute,
you may brand it clever....

...but there's a truth inherent in that remark that demands your respect and mine -- the little boy had come to church that day honestly believing that God would appear.

Now I must ask you this question, with all the strength that my soul can command: How many of you have come here today honestly believing that God would make a personal appearance? How many of you came honestly believing that this is an appointment -- this 11:15 hour on a Sunday morning -- that you keep personally with Jesus Christ? I submit to you, honestly I do, that the only basic justification for Christians coming together lies in the fact that, properly understood, the hour of divine worship is an encounter with God Himself.

I give that to you on good authority, for the sermon has a text, and properly so, recorded as the 20th verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, the words of our Blessed Lord:

"For where two or three are gathered together
in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

So now I ask you again, is this why you have come, to keep your personal appointment with God? Is this why you have come, because you do believe that in this place a divine encounter takes place?

Dr. James Reed is a distinguished preacher of the Presbyterian Church, Pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, and for a number of years the very able preacher of the National Radio Pulpit. Some four years ago he preached a sermon with this title: "Can Common Worship Be Sincere?" I didn't hear that sermon, I wish that I had. But I'm given to understand that the point that he was

trying to make is this: Is it possible for a number of different people to come together in a common place, and each one have a genuine sincere experience in his encounter with God? - - or dare we not assume that all who come, come because they have a personal appointment with Jesus Christ? So you see, I must ask you the question again that I asked earlier - - what brings you to this place, today? - - what brings you to this place repeatedly? Is it because you want fulfilled in your life a precious promise made by Jesus Christ: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I'll be there -- I will personally appear" . . . look upon it then as a time of divine encounter?

Well going back to the sermon that Dr. Read preached, which I didn't hear, I do have before me his introduction to that sermon, and I'd like to read it for you that you might have the direct quotation:

"I once read," said Dr. James Reed as he began his sermon, "a very amusing and satirical essay by Rose McCauley called 'How To Choose A Religion.' Although she later became a devout Anglican, this piece was written with tongue-in-cheek, she was pretending to be not the least concerned about the truths or falsehoods of different beliefs, or the worthiness of various styles of worship, but solely with the material advantages to be derived from them. She noted what demands were made by a particular religion, what kinds of people could be most inclined to meet if you embraced a particular religion....what sort of music or architecture you would find....how long the sermons might be....."

(you know, don't you, parenthetically speaking, that
in some churches sermons are longer or shorter than
they are in other places)

"...the social kudos attaching to membership in a particular church, and just how little you might be expected to contribute. The essay," continues

Dr. Read, "was very funny, but like all good satire, it left a little barb. For in these days when there is comparatively little interest in the truths for which a particular religion stands, and a total vagueness of denominational tenets, many people choose a church for reasons that may not be crudely materialistic, but have little to do with deep inward conviction . . . "

I submit to you that there is no deeper conviction than this one, that a man should choose a church because within its fellowship he receives an indelible stamp of Jesus Christ, and that when he's found in the presence of those who gather in the name of Jesus Christ, they honestly believe that they can be made aware of the presence of God through Christ.

Quite frequently in our New Member Group series I put the question to people: "What brings you to Saint Luke Church?" As you might suspect, there's a variety of answers, all good, and for your benefit, quite complimentary. But I wish sometimes that I could hear somebody articulate it this way:

"I came to Saint Luke Church because within
that gathered company of your membership I
felt the very presence of God."

I said something like this at 8:30 this morning, and when the service was over, a lady, as she was about to leave, said, "But, Pastor, some of us can't say it like that. but I want you to know that I keep coming back here because this is the way I happen to feel." Well maybe it's so personal for you that you'd be a bit embarrassed to put it into such words, but I still stand my ground - - this is the basic justification which is essential if people are to have a genuine Christian experience, that within the gathered company God's presence should be felt.

Sometimes there are people who like to embarrass preachers, you know that -- maybe you've delighted in doing it yourself. Occasionally people try me, put me

on. Here's a question that I have had to deal with occasionally: "Pastor, can a person be a Christian and not come to church?" The years have taught me that perhaps the better answer to this question is: "Maybe, yes" - - but notice the Yes was a qualification, and always it has to be maybe. Because it all depends upon the kind of a Christian you want to be, it all depends on how much of a Christian you want to be. It may all depend upon how seriously you want to take the precept and the dictates of Jesus Christ.

Now some of us have known some people who command our respect, who are very good people, very decent people, and sometimes their compassion and their good deeds far outrun ours, but they don't much come to church, and they don't feel the need to come to church. And I submit to you, honestly I do, that no matter how good they may be by not coming to church, they'd be far better if they did, because there isn't anything that can substitute for the felt presence of God within a company of believers.

I'm not a professional religionist, I'm not tell you this because I'm expected to say it before a group of people who have retained me as the shepherd and bishop of their souls. I say this to you as a matter of conviction, who has found it to be true out of his own experience.

Now if you promise me that you won't exploit what I'm about to tell you, I'm going to tell you this . . . back in September I reached for a book to read, maybe it was published 40 - 50 years ago, called "Adventures in Contentment" -- a very winsome type of thing, written by a man, I think, called David Grayson. He lived almost hermitlike with his sister, that is, the two of them had that kind of an existence, in some rural area in northeastern United States. He loved all of God's created world, and was very much at home in it. His sister, however, was the church-going one among the two, and every now and then she'd take him to task for not going to church. And then one day he decided to placate her -- perhaps not the best of all possible reasons for going to church -- and so he said,

Next Sunday I'll go with you. It happened to have been a perfectly beautiful day. You couldn't have asked for a more bright or beautiful sky -- brilliantly blue, flecked with the clouds that were white...the air was fresh and crisp...and every step that he took toward church was like walking a sacred aisle....

...and then when he got inside the church, the interior was drab...the music dragged...the preacher was dour, and he just couldn't let the sermon grip him at all. And all the while he was in that place he wished he were somewhere else - - now promise me you won't exploit my telling you this - - I think I can understand that.

...and that's one reason why some of us want to keep this place bright and beautiful, clean. That's one reason why some of us keep pleading for reverent demeanor within these walls, whether it's on a Sunday morning or during a choir rehearsal or a gathering of young people....so that a holy hush becomes this place. This is one reason why we want the music to be vibrant, this is one reason why the two men who serve you as wearers of the cloth want you to understand that they're ecstatically happy in being numbered in the joy of the redeemed. But if a person should come here on Sunday and would to God that he were somewhere else outside these walls, I should be very unhappy indeed, because the word of our Blessed Lord remains that where two or three come together in His name, He wants to be felt, His presence is meant to be known. And the indictment will not be so much against God as it would be against us who fail to exude His spirit.

I have to tell you this, however, and I think you need to hear it: according to basic Lutheran Lutheran theology there ought to be no such thing as a poor sermon. According to the basic Lutheran theology, it's the Holy Spirit who is always the preacher - - He may have to work within the limitations of the man who stands at the pulpit. I have listened to some mighty poor sermons in my day, and I've done my share of preaching poor sermons -- I know that. But of all the poor

sermons that I've heard, I can honestly tell you there was never a single sermon where somehow the truth of God did not come through.

I remind myself of the story of the old Scottish lady who wasn't very happy when she came to church, but she came to church without fail. She was annoyed by the organist, she didn't find the choir very edifying, and she was irritated by the personality of the preacher. And all the people in that little Scottish town took note of the fact that all of these things happened to be true, yet Sunday by Sunday she always came back to church. And one day the Scottish preacher made bold to put the question to her: "Tell me, everybody in this town knows how you feel about me, and yet every Sunday you come back to church - - why?" And she answered: "Bless you, Dominie, -- (that's the term that many a Scotsman uses for his pastor) - - "Bless you, Dominie, my quarrel is with you, not with my Lord."

...said Jesus Christ, where two or three are gathered together, you can expect me to show up.

What brings you to this place? A variety of reasons, perhaps, but ^{none} ~~far~~ more important in the sight of God than your respect for the words of His Blessed Son.

What makes a place holy? Not this lovely altar in front of you, with its magnificent wood carving. What makes a place holy? - - not simply these stained glass windows. Jesus Christ is not to be confined to the altar, He's not to be imprisoned in these stained glass windows. What makes a place holy is the fact that Jesus Christ is to be found in your heart - - it's when and where two or three come together in His name that the divine encounter takes place and the personal appearance is experienced.

So I beg you, make the necessary preparation before you come. Some of us do keep coming back to this place because of the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that we find in and through you. Make the necessary preparation that when you come to this place something of the indelible stamp of Christ will

be found in and through you. You and I have become according to the people with whom we associate. You and I, to all intents and purposes, become the accumulation of the influences upon our lives, by other people.

Said Jesus Christ - - "Where two or three are gathered together,
you can expect me."

....if when this hour of worship is over, you go your way, and you haven't felt the presence of God - - you won't blame Him, will you?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE POSSIBILITY WHICH IS PARADISE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

Perhaps you are aware of it, we're doing something today in Saint Luke Church that we've never done before, and to the best of my knowledge, I think I can presume to tell you this, most Lutherans throughout the United States and Canada and other parts of the world are finding themselves in a similar situation. For today we're introducing a new Day in the Calendar of the Church, properly referred to as the Day for the Feast of Christ The King.

Now maybe you're asking yourself the question, how does this happen? How does a day such as this get newly scheduled into the Calendar of the Church? Well there's an interesting answer. About ten years ago a whole new feeling began to come into all of Christendom, thanks to that grand and good man of the Church, the beloved Pope John XXIII, who opened the windows ajar and left a breath of fresh air come in upon all of us. Now thanks to his gracious influence, Christians, whatever label, found themselves talking together as they had not found themselves talking together before.

The results have been evidenced in many ways. As an example: there was set up a group of Christians who said, "Let's see what we might have in common as far as a calendar of the Church is concerned." Lutherans sat down at that table...some Presbyterians...some Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics. And as they deliberated they came up with the idea that this Feast of Christ the King really belongs to all of Christendom. And so it's included in this, the last Sunday of the Church Year.

I suppose I could also say quite parenthetically, that as those outside

of Rome discovered the benefit of this particular day, we could say a kind of 'trade experience' -- although they never thought of it that way -- they discovered what a wonderful hymn we have in "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," Luther's great hymn, inspired by the Psalm that meant so much to him during those difficult days. And so like as not, in many Roman Catholic parishes, they're doing something that they've never done before, they're singing Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Now quite specifically about this day, the Feast of Christ the King, it really came into the Calendar of the Roman Church back in 1925. Pope Pius the XI, reflecting upon the shattered world that surrounded him because of what had happened during that terrible World War I, issued a kind of proclamation that when the new world was to be re-built, it would have no meaning whatsoever, of course, unless it be built upon that foundation which is Jesus Christ. And that these kingdoms that had fallen, if they were to rise again, would have no lasting value unless the kingdoms of this world recognized the lordship, the kingship of Jesus Christ. And being a wise man, that Pope decided that it was not just enough to make a proclamation. He said, "We will write it into the Calendar of the Church. We will set aside one day in particular when people will talk about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. "For, said he, "only a few may read the proclamation. But for all the faithful who go to church, they may have impressed upon their minds, on this day in the calendar, that Jesus Christ is Lord above all lords and King above all kings."

It came upon us a little too soon this year. We should have been better prepared. But I can well imagine how this day has already triggered thoughts in the banner-maker of Saint Luke Church, and next year when we come to celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, we ought to have a very splendid banner representing this very fact. I'm anticipating, as perhaps some of you may be, that next year

at this time, surely weeks and months before next year at this time, that magnificent fanfare trumpet will be hanging on the rear wall of the Nave, and I can imagine how the trumpets will sound when we come to recognize Jesus Christ as King above all kings.

Now I have to tell you how important it is that it should be celebrated on a particular day, because human as we are, we need certain days when we recognize certain truths. You and I would be inclined to forget all too often the basic meaning of Christmas if Christmas were not written into the calendar of the Church. The fact that God did come to us is impressed all over again every time we celebrate Christmas Day -- the fact that this God who did come to us suffered on the cross and died is impressed upon us as in no other way as on each Good Friday we take time to think about it. So I could enunciate for you the values that come in adhering to a calendar of the Church. So today for the first time we establish what may well become a glorious tradition, the last Sunday of the Church Year, recognition of Jesus Christ as King.

The sermon on this day bears the title: "The Possibility Which Is Paradise" and the text from the Gospel which was read for you, oddly enough a text that you usually associate with Good Friday. It's recorded as the 43rd verse of the 23rd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, and is the reply that Jesus Christ made to a man who was dying and who in his lifetime had been something of a rascal, a rebellious chap. To Jesus Christ he said, "Lord, remember me - - " interestingly enough now, of all things -- "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And the text is the reply that Jesus Christ gave: "Verily I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

I suggest to you this morning, that the world is like a dying thief, like that dying thief, if you please. For up to that moment the dying thief had been heading faster toward hell than he had toward heaven. And I'm reluctant to tell

you this, I don't pretend to be a reader of the human scene, but from what I have seen and I have read, I am convinced to a degree -- to a degree that vexes me and irritates me and haunts me almost every waking moment, the world is like a dying thief - - - the world is heading faster toward hell than it is toward heaven. Exceptions of course here and there, but by and large it is a generalization that commands respect.

Dr. Robert Hilegraber (?) is a voice that needs to be recognized. Within the past month he had published his "An Inquiry Into The Human Prospect." It was part of my summer reading. It was not pleasant reading. He is not an optimist. He deals with all the forces and factors which are ever present as part of our civilization today. They are formidable and forbidding. In his final chapter, which interestingly enough is referred to as "Final Reflections on The Human Prospect" he comes to grips with the question: Is there hope for the human prospect? And his answer is a simple blunt NO. He doesn't quite see how any of us are going to make a change significantly enough in our life style by which the situation can be redeemed without having to pay, as he says, a fearful price. The only thing, if I remember correctly what he says, that might save us is something that comes in catastrophic fashion . . . and who knows what that could mean.

I suppose a fundamentalist preacher would say, "God has His ^{own} way of driving us to our knees. God has His own way of giving us a start all over again." I suggest to you this morning with all the strength that I can command, the world is like a dying thief -- that dying thief who was heading faster toward hell than he was toward heaven. But dare we believe that we are like that dying thief, who for some unexplainable reason was able to see a ray of hope, and centered that hope in the person of Jesus Christ and recognized in Him lordship

and kingship. And because of what happened in that moment we're led to believe, those of us who are willing to believe, that with God there is always another chance....with God, all things are possible....with God, it's never too late.

Well now, be careful what you do with that kind of a sentiment. Let's take a closer look at the text. For whatever the reason, this dying thief discovered a ray of hope, and that hope was centered in none other than the person of Jesus Christ -- not on the platform, not on the program, but in the person of Jesus Christ. When he said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom, I think I have to bring to your attention that he was willing to settle for less than he was able to get. He received far more than he asked for. He simply wanted to be remembered. Whenever this wonderful thing might happen, and he had no idea when it might occur, but for some unexplainable reason he believed that it would. It was a kind of vague trust. And then our Blessed Lord said to him, "Today you can be with me in Paradise."

Now what in the world does that mean? I know you'd be asking the question, "How do you define Paradise, Pastor" - - and I have an answer for you. Traditionally it meant "the abode of the righteous after they died." Now Jesus Christ is saying to this man who is crying out to him, "Today you can have the benefit of what you hoped for" - - as much as to say, your future can be now. Now underline that as strongly as you can, will you?

For some reason that I can't explain to you, nor to myself, most of us when we think about the goodness of God usually think about something that's yet to come. Why in the world we imprison God in the future, or I dare say, in the past, and give Him no credit whatever about His activity in the present hour, I'll never be able to tell you. But we do. Just last week some of us attended a meeting in the Luther Room, and in the small group session of which I was a part, somebody raised the question, "Can we honestly believe that God is as active in the world today as He was in the time of the Bible people?" And the

answer presumably was given: No, He was far more active then than now.

Now any number of people I know are inclined to think in those terms! For shame upon us! You can't imprison God in the past, and you do yourself a disservice and you short-change God when you think that He's going to be active only in some far-off event. Jesus Christ said to that chap: "Today you can have a relationship with me -- right now -- before you breathe your last. And rascal though you have been, revolutionary that you have been, a perpetrator of violence that you have been -- today it can be changed." So Jesus Christ spoke to him. The world is like a dying thief, I submit to you. We prefer to settle things violently. We arm ourselves militarily, as though we believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is always on the side of the stronger battalion. That's what that dying thief had believed. The world is like a dying thief. He lived at the expense of other people.

The world is like a dying thief -- we live at the expense of other people. We are exploiting our natural resources and living in a profligate manner at the expense of those who will come after us. We're hell-bound. The world can be like that dying thief who can discover that there's still time. The world can be like that dying thief and discover in that moment the tragedy and the glory of it, the years that had been wasted and the little chance to provide the corrective.

Now I don't pretend to tell you how the world itself can straighten out its disorder. I only know that the world has to begin with individuals straightening themselves out. And I know that some of you don't like to hear that. I know that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth He spent a great deal of His time trying to impress upon individuals the re-ordering of their lives. I know that once there were some people came to Him and they were all up-tight about the Kingdom -- Where is it? When is it? How is it? And as a student of the

Scriptures I know how He silenced them by saying, "Here it is! The Kingdom of God is among you" and He was standing right there among them and He was referring to Himself. That's the point at which we have to begin.

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that most of us think too little about a very wonderful truth: you don't have to die to get all the benefits of heaven -- you can begin to draw upon those benefits right now! In fact I'll even go so far as to say to you again with all the strength that I can command, if you're not drawing upon the benefits of Heaven right now, I'm not so sure that you're going to appreciate them after you die. The better world for which we dream under the Lordship of Jesus Christ begins with Jesus Christ taking over your heart and your mind.

Oh, it's expressed in a corporate way every now and then, imperfect as we are, its coming to us. You know one reason why I have such a high regard for this congregation -- never in my life have I been benefited by the fellowship of people such as you, where I find in this person and that person the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And that's why some of us thank God that we can be part of the Family of God, because within the Family of God more than in any unit here on earth there is expression given to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Once there was a preacher who discovered a woman, cultivated, sophisticated, who hadn't given much thought to the kind of thing in which he wanted to engage her, so he said to her, "Do you know that Jesus Christ has established a precise date for your salvation? -- a precise time when you can be part of His Kingdom?" She was somewhat troubled that he should talk to her in that manner, and she had to admit that she hadn't given much thought to that sort of thing. He said, "Well I would encourage you to think in those terms."

"Now furthermore," he said, "If I could assure you that Jesus Christ has set up an exact time for your salvation and for your being part of the Kingdom, would

you be willing to take it seriously and to meet that engagement?"

Still not fully appreciating all that he was trying to say, she did admit that she would.

He said, "All right, then, here is the precise time - - " - - and he quoted Scripture for her: "Behold now is the accepted time, now is the day of our salvation."

It may be the midnight hour for some of us. But thanks to Him who came to establish His Kingdom, we were never meant to go to Hell. And that's something worth remembering.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

(complete introduction not recorded)

First, Christianity is one among many religions.

Second, we have much in common with the other religions.

Now third, the declaration: Of all the religions, Christianity remains distinctive. And that distinction lies in what we are called upon to celebrate so clearly these next few weeks, that God comes to us uniquely and persuasively in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now the text for this sermon, recorded as the 18th verse of the first chapter of the Gospel according to John: "No man has seen God at any time. God's only Son who is nearest to the Father's heart, He has made Him known."

Truth is truth, of course it is, but sometimes we give it more heed when we recognize the authority of the one who speaks these words of truth. I bring it to your attention now that they were spoken by none other than that individual who I suppose was closer to Jesus Christ than any other person on this earth at the time that He lived, other than Mary and Joseph, that beloved disciple, a man named John. And when you come to the altar very shortly, why don't you take a good look at those figures carved into wood here at the altar at Saine Luke and appreciate all over again that presence of the man nearest Jesus Christ, leaning upon His shoulder. Now presumably because of insights that he had that few others had, he writes these words for us: "No man has seen God at any time. God's only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart -- He has made Him known."

Is that double-talk or isn't it? "No man has seen God at any time" - - and yet before the sentence is concluded John would have us believe that He's made known to us by Jesus Christ.

When John writes these words for us he's coming to us straight out of good

Jewish tradition and teaching, for the Jews made much of the fact that God must remain invisible. He wasn't to be a God who could be seen. You may remember how when the Children of Israel were wandering through the wilderness, heading toward the promised land, that God got them ready, laid down a series of commandments, one of which was this: "You shall not make unto thee any graven images." - - for they were to be surrounded by people, on every side, who made gods, with their own hands they created them, out of silver, out of stone, our of gold. God, the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, says: "O no you don't! You're going to be different." They went so far as never so much as, for a period in their history, to attempt to pronounce the name of God, so very removed was He from them and so high and holy regard were they to have had for Him. And frequently they make reference to Him not simply as the God Jahweh, but "I AM THAT I AM". You understand the reasoning, don't you? A god who can be made by somebody's hands isn't really much of a god. A made god really has no meaning, one that we can fashion and create, one that we can put down in front of us and stare at it. A God who is the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob says, "You don't do this" - - so straight out of such tradition John, the beloved disciple, says, "No man has seen God at any time"....but then he goes on to say, which is the heart of the matter: "The only begotten Son, He has declared Him, the Father's Son who is nearest to his heart, He has made Him known"....because down deep inside every one of us there is a desire to know what God is really like.

We want so much to be able to see God. In company with some of you I too have traveled in other parts of the world, where there are other religions, and I've come back to fully appreciate the advantage that we have, for we know something of the nature and the character of God in a way that they do not know. The distinction which is ours lies in the fact that God has made Himself known

to us in Jesus Christ. What makes the Christian religion distinctive is Jesus Christ. He's ours. And He's ours alone -- not to keep, of course not, but to share.

You've undoubtedly had an experience where you find yourself in a room, partitioned from other rooms, and in the room adjoining yours you can hear voices but you never so much as see the face of the person who is speaking. It's far less than satisfying, for there are some of us who honestly believe that they can better understand what a person really is if they can look into their face, look into their eyes, if we can trace something of their character upon their face.

Some people feel that way about God -- if only, to use a figure of speech -- we could trace the lines of love upon His face, if only we could see Him at close range! Advent deals with the great and wonderful truth that God stoops to accommodate Himself to us. You and I are incapable of finding our way to God. What we know of God we know because He sees fit to reveal Himself, He comes to us -- that's what Advent means. There are any number of people I know, within and without the Faith, who fail to appreciate the real meaning of Advent and the meaning of the Incarnation. Press them against the wall and ask them what the Incarnation really means -- they can't fully explain it because they don't think enough about it. And they fail to allow its great truth to make its impression upon the fabric of their minds.

I happen to be one of those who sometimes tucks things under the glass plate which happens to be on top of his desk (less cluttered now than years ago)...and when I was ridding things out, there was one picture that I could not find it in my heart to remove. It's the picture of that grand and good man of the Church, Pope John XXIII. I remember in the first year of his papacy, when Christmas came around he went to a prison in Rome, and he said ever so eloquently, "You could not come to me -- therefore I have come to you" Because

we are imprisoned by our fears, because we are imprisoned by our frustrations, because we are imprisoned by our sins, by our wickedness, we are incapable of going to God. So God, out of love, comes to us. You remember that three-word definition for God from Sunday School days: "God is Love." It's the nature of love to seek the object of love. The lover is always going to his beloved. In order to do that, God who is love so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. So God, we Christians cherish the thought, makes Himself known to us through His Son.

Do you remember when He was here on earth, the disciples were up-tight as to what was the basic nature and the character of God. And they came to Jesus one time and they made it known to Him: "Tell us really what God is like! and we'll be satisfied." Quietly and calmly He stood in front of them and He said, "Take a look. I and the Father are one, is the fundamental truth. He who would see the father sees me -- he who sees me sees the Father." is a free translation.

Is it possible to behold the face of God today? Is God being made visible now? He comes to me as I read the records, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...He comes to me as I identify with you within His Church. There are those who put the Church in this manner: The Church is the extension of Jesus Christ in the world today as it is bound together by the Holy Spirit. There are those of you who help me read the fine lines of love upon the face of God -- today -- in this place. And because we have the understanding of the Sacrament that we do, God comes to us, as we receive His Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament. He who would discern spiritual things must ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit by which he can see these things. God makes Himself known to those who desire His appearing. And that's what Advent is all about. Get ready! He's coming! Don't miss Him! Of all the people on the face of the earth, we Christians are the fortunate ones. No man has seen God at any time, but the Son, nearest the father, has revealed Him, has made Him known to us. This I most certainly believe. And that's why I can say to you now: May the peace of God that passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through

Thoughts at Year's End

What meaning is to be drawn from the events of 1981? It was, first of all, a year of sickening violence. The near-assassinations of a pope and an American president, followed by the murder of Anwar Sadat, underline once again the way history can be deflected or disfigured by men who want to kill. But the meaning of those events is not confined to personal tragedies or near-tragedies. Far more ominous than the ease with which individuals are exposed to assassination is the ease today with which civilization itself can be assassinated.

It is natural and necessary for people to be shocked by the ready availability of murderous weapons. Even more shocking is the ready availability of the weapons of holocaust and race suicide. But the greatest danger of all is represented by the widespread notion that the sheer accumulation of such weapons has anything to do with national security. By the end of this year the United States will own approximately 2,400 more nuclear explosives than it did at the beginning of

the year, at a cost of billions of dollars. According to some estimates, the U.S. now has upwards of 35,000 of such explosives. Guesses about the size of the Soviet nuclear stockpile are not nearly so high but high enough. It is difficult to think of any military purpose that is being served by the accumulation. If only half the nuclear bombs from both countries were to be detonated, a large part of the earth could become uninhabitable. But the stockpiling continues, year in and year out, more a reflection of our infatuation with numbers than any real understanding of the requirements of national security.

Precise calculations about the destructive effects of a nuclear exchange are impossible. It is possible, however, to calculate the effects of the explosion of a single nuclear bomb on one city. Suppose a single one-megaton bomb were to be dropped on Chicago. The resultant death toll would be more than 200,000 people with at least three times that number needing urgent treatment for burns and radiation. What is Chicago's capability for coping with disasters? If every single surviving physician and nurse and paramedic within 50 miles of Chicago were to be mobilized, and every available hospital bed were to be utilized, the city's emergency capability would be exhausted with the first 5,000 patients. How would the ambulances and fire-fighting equipment get through the wreckage in the streets? After the firestorms subside, where do the people go? What do they do? How do they obtain food? These questions, of course, apply not just to Chicago but to every city in the United States.

Nothing in human history is more obscene than the cool discussions of competing nuclear strategies by apocalyptic game-players. All sorts of scenarios are being put forward about the circumstances under which we would drop bombs on the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union would drop bombs on us, as though both countries were involved in

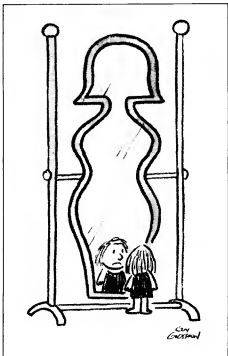
nothing more than a super backgammon game. The strategists in both countries need to be reminded that they are not playing with poker chips but with human lives and the whole of the human future.

A mammoth and deadly illiteracy has seized us. People listen to debates about the MX or other delivery systems without being told that, even after all these systems are completed, our capacity for intercepting or knocking down attacking missiles will still be close to zero. They still don't seem to know that the total defense of the United States and its people is being tied not to any workable military system but to a psychological theory. The government is betting the life of this society on the rational response of the enemy's leaders to the fact of our retaliatory capacity. It is assumed that the men who govern an enemy nation will not be caught up in a macho nuclear madness but will instead be so sensitive to the damage we can inflict on them that they will exercise total restraint in their own policy. It is not asked why, if statesmen can be intelligent enough to fear apocalyptic force, they are not intelligent enough to avoid stockpiling it beyond any conceivable rational use.

The ultimate insanity is represented by nuclear-tipped missiles being cozily ferried around on tracks while our cities and all our people are open and exposed. If the strategists want a scenario to end all scenarios, let them hypothesize a situation in which the silos survive in all their hardened splendor—a triumph that will go uncelebrated because the vulnerable humans are trapped in radioactive rubble.

At year's end, any inventory of our assets must begin with the understanding that the freedom and security of the American people, or any people for that matter, rests on the control of force and not the use of force. The time has come to stop throwing billions of dollars at problems and to start thinking about the genuine requirements of a world without war.

—N.C.



"THE DAY THAT'S BEFORE US"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from his Son Jesus
Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

When I was a little lad I had strange and uncomfortable thoughts about the end of the world. For the life of me, I can't quite figure out even to this day why I felt exactly as I did. But I remember how troubled I was at the thought of the world coming to an end before I had a chance to grow up. Presumably it wasn't that I was shaken by the possibility of the cataclysm, but would you believe it, that maybe what unsettled me most was the belief that I could be shortchanged. That is, I wouldn't have a chance to live out my life to a normal conclusion, or perhaps I may not be able to make my contribution to society.

As memory serves me, I don't remember ever discussing this with my peers, or as far as that's concerned, discussing with anybody at all. Now why do I mention it to you this morning? Perhaps at any age some of us have a way of believing that time seems to be running out on us. Perchance that's the reason why a few years ago that witticism introduced by a morning radio commentator made its dent upon the fabric of our minds: "Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

William Barclay recalls for us how Andrew Marvell could always hear

"Time's wing-ed chariot hurrying near"

...or how John Keats was haunted by fear that he might cease to be

"before his pen had gleaned his teeming brain"

For me, he's always been a favorite -- maybe he's your favorite too, Robert

Louis Stevenson, once spoke in this same manner when he wrote these lines:

"The morning drum call on my eager
ear thrills unforgotten yet
The morning dew lies yet undried
along my fields at noon;
But now I pause at whiles in what
I do,
And count the bell, and tremble,
lest I hear, my work untrimmed,
The sunset gun too soon."

Or on the other hand, could it be that some of us live out the days of our years troubled by what we might refer to as the "unexpected crisis moment."

Now all of this leads me to introduce to you at this time the text for today's sermon. It happens to be one of my favorite passages in the entire New Testament. We used to read it on the first Sunday in Advent when we followed the old cycle of Lessons. And even though we've introduced a new cycle this year, repeatedly in the course of the past week I have read it. It's from the Letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to certain Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome. It happens to be the 11th and 12th verses of his 13th chapter: "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to wake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light."

It seems to me as I continue to study this text that it says two things to us. One, the shortness of time. Second, the threat of time.

Now for the most part when we think of time, we think of the fact that it's running out on us. None of us knows but what tomorrow could be our last.

We never quite know how much time is left for any of us. But I'm not so sure that that's the important thing. It seems to be this morning that what we need to recognize is the fact that if we don't watch out, whatever time we have before us could threaten. And as it threatened us, crippled us, and fail to draw out the best that we have to offer.

David Watson wrote a book, I think this past year, that bears the title: "In Search of God." He reflects upon the mood of our day, which is one, according to him, of despair and frustration. He goes on to say that most of our leading experts are extremely pessimistic. He includes in his book a consideration of a work that was done by the computer scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Professor J. Forrester. Do you know what he did? He did the kind of thing that perhaps would have appealed to you if you were daring enough to do it -- he gathered together data that he felt significant of our day and relevant to our situation and fed it into the computer so that the computer might predict for us what lies ahead. How he did it I don't know. But he gathered together all the related data dealing with the population picture today -- the population explosion in other parts of the world, the zero growth population here in our part of the world. Then as he gathered all of that together he put that in the computer.....

...then he moved over into the field of pollution: the problem that we have on our hands regarding the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. He put all of that data under the title POLLUTION, 1974 -- fed that to the computer....

...then he moved over into the world of finance - interlocking directorates, deficit financing, inflation -- put all of that into the computer....

...then he concerned himself with technology -- what it's been able to accomplish and what he believed technology was doing to us....he fed that into the computer...

...then he concerned himself with our natural resources -- how we use them, recklessly and otherwise, our search for new sources...the distribution of these natural resources, the way we're able to lay hold upon them, the way they're manipulated, controlled, by a handful of people, as the case may be.....he fed that into the computer.

...then he dealt with what he referred to as the quality of our life -- the kind of human beings we are today, presumably dealing with our moral and emotional, our fears and our frustrations.....

....then last of all he dealt with food production.

What do you suppose is the computer's answer? Out came the prediction that civilization has perhaps only one generation to survive.

In many informed circles there is an atmosphere of total frustration. The conclusion in many quarters is that man has no answers. Prophets of doom today are today's scientists.

Now let me ask you to think about something that we don't often recognize. We've thought about it once or twice and we've shoved it into the background. But it ought to haunt us, because it did happen in our day, the day for many of us. The atomic bomb in Hiroshima killed 87,000 people in one second. According to the facts and figures which are at hand and I am about to share with you, the hydrogen bomb, tested seven years later, was a thousand times stronger. The bomb to which we referred to in 1945 killed 87,000 people in one second....seven years later, we had on our hands a bomb that was a thousand times stronger. Only two years after that, Americans tested the cobalt bomb, and what did they prove? We proved that the destruction of all life on earth is possible. The explosion of a cobalt bomb would cause a radioactive cloud whose degree of destruction would be 300,000 times stronger than the first hydrogen bomb....which in turn was a thousand times stronger than the first atomic bomb. It's been said that mankind now has sufficient nuclear explosives in the world to eliminate itself 50,000

times over.

If you don't mind, the facts about pollution are equally alarming. I can only give it to you as I read it: the average American has twelve parts per million DDT in his fatty tissues. Now maybe that doesn't mean anything to you until I tell you that with only seven parts in meat, such meat is considered unfit to eat. Many scientists today declare that all life is imperiled by DDT pollution alone.

But I suppose we are not the first to look upon ourselves as living under a cloud. We are not the first to say that we live in dark and difficult times. Presumably every generation feels that way. Bless Viola Lovre's soul, she told me some time ago that she went back over those family Christmas letters that she's been wont to write for twenty years -- the kind of thing that you do, you know, you sit down, you reflect, you share news about your family, where you happen to live, the situation in which you find yourself against the background of the present day.....she went back over her letters and discovered that she was beginning every one of those for twenty years in the same way: "We live in dark and difficult times."

The early Christians felt that way. It was exactly in that kind of a world that Jesus Christ was born. It was in that kind of a world in which the Christian Church was developed. But mark you, when the Apostle Paul sits down and writes a letter to Christians in Rome, he does not say -- and this is very, very important -- he does not say: "The day is far spent, the night is at hand".... as though it's time for the curtain to fall. He was Christian to the core, and that is why he wrote, and notice the choice of nouns and where they appear: said he -- "The night is far spent (not "the day") -- "The night is far spent -- it's the day that's at hand." For Christians were meant to face life, come wind or weather, full-fisted -- head-on -- to seize the moment and to live it to the full.

There's an illustration that I'm inclined to use from time to time. In case

YOU'VE FORGOTTEN it, I'm going to remind you of it now. Some years back when there was a terrible volcanic eruption in Italy, there was ruin everywhere. And the only element of hope that appeared on the horizon was a fully-cassocked Roman priest, tall and gaunt, walking amidst the people suffering despair, with a baby in his arms. When you think of a baby you always think of tomorrow.

When God's love was so demonstrated to us, He came in the form of a Babe. Christians are meant to have their faces toward the dawn, not the setting of the sun. "The night is far spent" - but it's the day that's at hand, and God willing, maybe when we come back next Lord's Day I'll be able to take it from that point. But in the meantime let me read for you quickly what left its dent upon the fabric of my heart when as a student in seminary and the outbreak of World War II, I read the work of the Jewish poet, Stefan Zweig. In German he wrote his very remarkable play called "Jeremias." With marvelous insight and creative power he dramatizes the life of the greatest of the prophets, and the last tragic days of Jerusalem. At length the city is taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and the long line of captives moves off from the loved hill of Zion to the far, far land of exile. And as they march they sing, and what a song:

"We tread the holy path of our sorrows,
From anguish to anguish, by pain to be purified,
We the warred upon, we the conquered,
Ever made prisoners, ever made free,
Ever destroyed and ever renewed,
We of all peoples the jest and the shuttlecock,
We the one homeless nation of the earth,
March down the centuries,
All that are left of us,
A band without number,
Homewards to God - -
God the beginning and God the ending - -
Till He Himself be our city, our Home,
Who, as we, without rest with the stars and the years
Travels the Universe, circling in light.
Forth we go, 'forth to the future unseen,'
A people ruined; a spirit - - immortal."

And then Zweig makes the Chaldeans comment in amazement. A soldier says:

"Look! Look! They march into the sunlight! There is a glory on this people, a dawn upon their faces! Mighty must be their god!" A captain rebukes him: "Their god! Have we not broken down his altars? Have we not conquered Him?" But the soldier replies: "It is impossible to conquer the invisible. You can kill men, but not the God who lives in them. You can compel a people, but its spirit - never!" The trumpets sound for the third time. The sun is now risen over Jerusalem and shines upon the ranks of a nation marching from Zion, forth into the centuries.

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"PUSH AND PULL"

- Learning How To Love Meaningfully in
The Meanwhile

EVEN SO, Lord Jesus Christ,
come into our hearts.....now. Amen.

Gilbert K. Chesterton is supposed to have referred to an acquaintance of his by saying, "He seemed always to be coming from some place, but going nowhere." That description, no matter how apt for Chesterton's friend, is not a proper one for the Christian. For the Christian of all people knows where he's come from and what his destination is meant to be.

We are a people who are launched by the past and we're being propelled toward a definite future. This fact is evidence, of course, that we are a people of one book with two parts: our sacred writings consist of the Old and of the New, and while the old takes us back to the very beginning of time to the moment of creation, the new gives us a forward look to that time of a new heaven and a new earth.

This, of course, when we recognize it, makes for an optimum formula for living. Poor indeed, I say to you, is that person who has no appreciation for the past. Poorer still is that person who is not drawn forward by the prospect of some good thing that lies ahead. Of course the poorest of all people is the individual who finds no purpose for living in the present moment.

And all such thinking prompts me to turn your attention to the Scripture we considered last Sunday. In my humble judgment there is no passage in Scripture that better sets the mood of Advent than that Letter that Paul wrote to the Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome, and specifically the 13th chapter, the 11th and 12th verses. Traditionally it was read on Advent Sunday. Last Sunday our sermon was based upon it. I can't have done

with it. It commands continued attention, and so it serves as the basis for all that's to be said this morning.

Perhaps you recall it -- let me read it for you again:

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand,
Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness
and let us put on the armor of light."

Now I've checked this translation out for you, for this Scripture, in at least seven different translations. And I want to give you a measure of crystallization, if you don't mind, of all seven of those translations and provide you with the gist of what Paul, it seems to me, is saying here, in what I might refer to as modern jargon. Recklessly and boldly I say to you, the text could read like this: "What's over is over -- the past has run its course -- yesterday has come and gone -- tomorrow is upon us, the future is near, it's at hand. It's inevitable. So, in the meantime, let's get down to business. Let's act, let's produce, let's live, in love as by God's grace we were meant to live -- today."

Now the lesson of this text, freely, boldly, recklessly translated in this way, the lesson is not easily mastered. Many of us just don't know how to live in the present moment, because we haven't learned how to master or to handle the past, nor have we mastered how to handle the future that's yet to come. We could find ourselves somewhat in the situation in which Col. John Glenn found himself as he soared into outer space. As you might expect, they have films accompanied by a narration of his flight aboard Friendship 7. Perhaps you've heard the voice that speaks in this manner: "Col. Glenn is now on his journey toward the night of tomorrow and the dawn of yesterday" -- he made reference to Glenn's passage through three days of sunrise and sunset in four hours of earth-time. So it could be that way for us, we are launched backward, we move forward. Is it the past we're trying to get caught up with, or the concentra-

tion we make upon the future, so that all the time the present moment could be unrecognized and its demands unheeded?

I do honestly believe, ardently so, that Advent in Saint Luke this year is more meaningful than ever before. Maybe we're just becoming increasingly spiritually mature. And so as I stand at this desk this morning I would remind you that during Advent we're caught up in two directions, honestly we are. And maybe that's why it has its appeal for us - - we're caught up by the pressure of the past....we're caught up by the anticipation of some great event in the future. Now let me explain that to you.

During Advent we look back to the fact that He who is to come already came! Advent reminds us that there was that point in history, specifically, when God came to us in the form of Jesus Christ. That's looking back to the past.

...now there are some people in their Christian experience who don't do anything else but that -- not that it isn't good. It's not good enough. If the Jesus Christ whom you love and adore is simply a character in history, someone who lived at once-upon-a-time, even though He actually lived, but you confine Him to the past, you're making a mistake, you're lacking in a valid Christian experience. But we do well to look back and remember.

And Advent, these four weeks before Christmas, serves as time for remembering, and I'm not belittling it. In fact, I'll go so far as to say that for some of us it's the most nostalgic season of the year. If ever nostalgia sets in, it's now, when we look back and remember other Christmases - - how when you sang in the choir....when you sang and participated perhaps in the Christmas pageant....when you went caroling. At the second service this morning there were some people about the third pew back from the pulpit and when I looked down

and saw them there, immediately I waxed nostalgic -- they were from my home town, from the very church where I was baptized and confirmed, and as I looked at them, particularly so this morning, I remembered Christmases in that little town in that little church.

Some of you may remember as you approach Christmas, there was that Christmas Eve that you received your engagement ring....some of you may remember it was on Christmas Eve when you looked forward to the birth of your first child. Christmas -- the entire season that precedes it -- smacks of nostalgia. But a man can't go on living, no matter how he may be strengthened by it, by simply looking backward.

On the other hand, Advent also says: Look ahead! For He who came comes, and will come again. That's why I wanted you to give particular heed to the hymn that we sang before the sermon -- really it's a hymn in three parts, that's what it is. The first part, the first stanza, gives the longing of Israel for the promised Messiah. The second stanza indicates how the Promised One came, in all His glory, and then begins to intimate what the third stanza is going to talk about, how in the grand and glorious day at the end of all things, we will sup with Him, we will be in the great hall, there will be choruses of angels -- the imagery is absolutely superb -- the event that's yet to take place.

So there are some Christians who begin each day by looking forward to what's yet to come, and they concentrate upon the future. Unhappily for some people, they live so much in the future that they forget to pay heed to today. There are people like that, who are always waiting for that which is yet to come, and in the meantime they miss the blessing of the present moment.

Now if it's a title that you'd like for this sermon, I'm not being at all facetious when I suggest "Push And Pull" - - "Push And Pull" with a sub-title: "Learning How To Live Meaningfully In The Meanwhile."

I'd better explain that. Christians are meant to be pushed by the past. Christians are meant to be pulled by the future, attracted to, drawn by some good thing yet to happen. But Christians are also people who are meant in the meantime -- meanwhile -- to live their days meaningfully. I am a firm believer that we're meant to learn from history, and I'm also a firm believer that no present moment can be authenticated unless it's being lived out within the shadow of that which is yet to come. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that in God's plan for our lives, the best always lies ahead? And if you find that hard to believe, then maybe you're placing a low value on the prospect of heaven.

Now the Apostle Paul says, alright, the past is over, the future is yet to come, but in the meantime, what are we expected to do? -- he says, we're expected to do something, and we're expected to live, by the grace of God, meaningfully. And that means to live a life of love. Today, which God has given to us, on the basis of what's past and in the light of what's yet to come -- live out today -- meaningfully -- and the Christian is always meant to order the days of his years by loving and serving people.

I know that there are some people who look back and think the better days have come and gone, they were the good old days, and they see nothing bright and promising in the future. They look upon it dismally, and so they say, 'Eat, drink and be merry, because tomorrow we die.' - nothing to it.' That isn't Christian philosophy! Christian philosophy, if you want to put it that way, does put it that way, does say, 'Eat, drink and be merry -- live, live to the full, because tomorrow we go on living!' As dear old Ellwood DeLong used to say to me, that blessed soul, the octogenarian who came and left such a stamp upon us in Saint Luke -- that a man was never meant to live somehow, but a man was always meant to live triumphantly. And a man lives triumphantly when he's

loving. The victory of life is always to be found in loving. Said St. John of the cross, "In the evening of our life we will be changed by the way we loved in the day-time." Coleman McCarthy is that other writer on the editorial page of a local newspaper that always commands my respect. He's perceptive. Some time ago I clipped for my files what he had written about that grand old man of Judaism -- perhaps not so old, I shouldn't have put it that way, he was about 65 - 68 when he died -- Rabbi Abraham Heskall -- a marvelous spirit, respected by all people, whatever their race or religion. He used to tell the story, legendary perhaps, that once upon a time, somewhere on the face of the earth, in a tiny kingdom, when they harvested the crops and brought the grain in to put in the store-house, they discovered, when they went to use it, that practically all of it was poisoned. Their experience had already proven that those who had eaten of the poisoned grain became insane.

Now what were they to do? They wanted to go on living. They didn't want to die, and in order to live they had to eat something. Well, the kingdom in that legendary kingdom issued a decree: Of the poisoned grain, those who could eat of it could go ahead and eat of it. But in his kingdom there would be a select number of people, carefully chosen, who would scrounge around and find a source of food that they could eat safely -- limited as that supply might be. The decree was that they were not to eat of the poisoned grain, that they were to eat of this other food. For, said the king, there must be left on the face of this earth and in my kingdom a handful of people who remind the rest of us that we're insane.

-- which is simply to suggest to you this morning, my friend, in a world that's being branded as mad, in a world that seems in many quarters to become increasingly insane, God is saying to Christians: "Watch your diet! -- Scrounge around until you find the proper spiritual food and live on it in order that you might love. For living was meant for loving. It's the only way a mad world might have any promise of a tomorrow. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"A GIFT FOR ALL SEASONS"

Ah, Dearest Jesus, Holy Child,
Make thee a bed, soft undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for thee.
Amen.

Whatever our years, most of us have lived long enough by this time to have accumulated a list of what we might refer to as "Life's Embarrassing Moments." One of mine, that I remember so well, came several years back when a friend of ours visited Winifred and me at our place in the country. She happened to have been someone that we had befriended, together with other members of her family. So she came to pay us a visit.

Winifred being the gracious one, was showing her around the house. And as they went from room to room, I happened to catch an uneasy look in the eye of our friend. She was glancing from wall to wall - - not that she was critical of our furnishings, but as I reflected later, she was looking for something that wasn't there, and something, rather proudly, she had come expecting to find.

You see, months earlier, she had done a painting for us to express her gratitude. It was her intention, of course, that it should hang from a suitable place....a good reminder to us of her gratitude, and perhaps of her artistic capability. Alas, however, we never just got around to hanging it. Somewhere it was stacked away and I'm afraid, in her judgment, unappreciated and unseen. It was an embarrassing moment, and the memory lingers on.

But there's a moral here, and perhaps you recognize it immediately. Gifts are meant for using. More than one hand has been stayed at the counter when the voice of the practical person who accompanied you on your shopping tour said, "Whatever you do, get something that he could or should use - - don't waste your money on anything else." For gifts are meant to be used.

Now relax a bit, my friend. I'm not here this morning, in this sermon, to give you a buyer's guide for Christmas shopping - - it's too late for that, what with Christmas just a few days away. Rather it's intended to be a manual-of-sorts for the receiver rather than the giver, and quite specifically as it's related to the greatest of all gifts that's coming our way - - Jesus Christ our Saviour....

..Christmas is the celebration of God's gift to us. And being of a practical nature, God's bent on giving us something useful.

Now some folks I know, when they select a gift, select it with just when and how and where we're going to use it. They think they know us that well, and they calculate very carefully. Now all of this is prompted by the text for today's sermon, and the sermon does have a title and if you're at all interested, this is the title: "A Gift For All Seasons".....and the text is the passage of Scripture closely related to the one that we have been referring to for the past two Sundays in Advent -- it's the Epistle that was read for a number of years on the First Sunday. It's that wonderful 13th chapter of the Letter that Paul wrote to Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome. You may remember that last Sunday and the Sunday before we dealt with it, one of those verses: "The night is far spent; the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light" . . . and then the Apostle Paul goes on with the verses that follow immediately and tells us how a Christian ought to behave in a critical period of life -- certain things that a Christian ought not to do. And then to hold him in good stead, he comes to that concluding verse which serves as the basis for today's sermon: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't make provision to satisfy the desires of the flesh."

Now having checked out this verse of Scripture in at least eight different translations, let me in my own free-lance sort of way give you a rather reckless

interpretation of it. Remember now, this is the way it's read in a classic fashion: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

...here's a reckless, free-lance interpretation:

"Use Him!....unwrap Him!....Take Him off the shelf!

...Don't stack Him away . . . !"

We live in a day and age when all kinds of surveys are made and I'm waiting now momentarily for somebody to come up with this bright idea, embarrassing as it can prove, to make a kind of survey as to how many gifts were given last year that remain stacked away on a shelf somewhere -- still in the box, unwrapped perhaps, but stacked away....the necktie you never wore....the jacket or the blouse that still hangs in the closet....the camera that you haven't used....the power tool that you haven't handled since you got it. One might be surprised with the results. And all of this leads me to say to you that now, with the approach of Christmas, let's remember that when God gave us that precious gift, He meant it to be used. Being of a practical nature, although He is liberal with our sinful nature, He does exercise a kind of economy, and He's not about to give us something that can't be a gift for all seasons.

Now I know very well what you're thinking to yourself, knowing human nature as you do, that there are some gifts that we don't use because it isn't anything that we ever wanted - - it wasn't on our list, and we're not too well pleased that somebody chose it for us. During World War II people who lived in Europe used to get packages from America with special shipping privileges called "Unsolicited Gift" - - they got something, but it wasn't especially something for which they themselves had asked. But what they got they got because somebody, moved by generosity and compassion, had been thinking of them. And then perhaps, out of the sense of need, they put it to use.

I suggest to you that there are some of us who don't fully realize how much we need some of the things we're given. And that's precisely true as far as God's

gift to us is concerned. And a gift, maybe after it's all said and done, has little value for the person who receives it unless he uses it. Some wit once said: "This gift, like a cake of soap, will be of little value to you unless you use it!"

I remember, and remember well, the very first sermon that Pastor David preached from this pulpit. He preached on the highest kind of love, which is forgiving love. I remember his text, I remember his opening words to the sermon. And I remember an illustration that he used, an illustration that I had never heard before, and I'm about to repeat it for you.

It was the story of a chap who had been on sentry duty during one of the wars, I don't remember which - - but he had fallen asleep. The military court sentenced him to death because they just couldn't tolerate a man at the post of duty falling asleep and endangering the lives of hundreds of people, to say nothing of the security of the forces. His mother, moved by compassion, made a plea to the President of the United States, who gave him a pardon...

...but for some unexplainable reason, the fellow refused to accept the pardon. His mother pursued it. It went to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court decreed that there wasn't a thing they could do about it, that the pardon could not be made effective if it were not received, if the individual would not accept it.....

....isn't that a horrible thought, regarding God's gift to us? -- that this gift that He gave to us in the form of a Saviour should have no value unless you receive it and put it to use as it was intended for each one of us.

Now let's get back again to the reason why some of those gifts remain unwrapped, unopened. Again I say, it could be because it was something that we particularly did not have on our list, something that perhaps we particularly didn't want. It wasn't what we had in mind. And that was the trouble with

ancient Judea. Judea didn't want a preacher....Judea didn't want a prophet. Judea just didn't want somebody, no matter how kind and good, going around the country saying nice things. Ancient Judea wanted a revolutionary, they wanted a man who with violence would drive the enemy from their land. That's what they wanted. And so they never really put Jesus Christ to use! He wasn't what they had in mind.

There are some gifts that we don't use because we just don't like them. There are countries in certain parts of the world who just don't like Jesus Christ -- they don't like what He represents -- they don't like what He teaches. And so they refuse to accept Him, and by governmental decree they've denied His availability to their own people.

...there are some people who don't use Jesus Christ because they don't like Him, and they feel uncomfortable when He's around. He pricks the conscience, He irritates us when we want to do our sinning. He talks about salvation, and we'll give Him a hearing, but then He keeps pressing it -- He wants us to make a decision now, and we say, "Go away and let us alone -- we'll think about this some other time."

...there are some people who are uncomfortable in the presence of Jesus Christ because He knows us for exactly what we are, and some of us feel very uncomfortable in the presence of people who know us for what we are. That's why some of us shy away from some people -- we know full well that they read the fine print in our lives, and we're not very pleased with the fine print that they can read. And so we don't want Him around -- we'll put Him on the shelf, we'll stack Him in the closet. There are some people like that.

There are some people who will think of Him, and His gift, only occasionallylike the Christmas creche figures, if you please. We're indebted to somebody in this parish who once a year comes and takes the figures with a delicate hand

and takes care of all the scratches and the mars and the touches that we put on them since we used them last year...

....so maybe occasionally we'll polish Him up, and take Him out of the wrappings, and put Him on display. But that's about it. That's about the only use that we'll make of Him.

The sterling silver-smiths of America tell us that it's unwise, really it is, to keep silver wrapped up in cellophane and plastic, that the best way to keep silver with its luster is to use it. The more we use it, the more it retains its luster, strange as it may seem to you. For some of us Jesus Christ has lost His luster because we use Him ~~to~~ infrequently. Would you be willing to accept this suggestion, that some of us never quite know how to handle Jesus Christ because we've never mastered the book of instructions? The Bible tells us just what Jesus Christ is meant to do, how He's meant to operate in our lives, how He can work most effectively and efficiently. Some of us haven't given much heed to this manual of instructions. By the same token, certain gifts that we've received we've never operated them to their maximum efficiency, because we've never much given heed to the book of instructions.

Then there are some folks who never make much use of Jesus Christ because they think it is a complicated thing, this whole matter of religion. And because it appears so complicated, we shy away from what Jesus Christ is meant to do for us. Shamefacedly I tell you that several years back I bought what I thought was a very good camera. But I have a very simple mind when it comes to operating things, and I never quite took the time to master the art of using that camera... ..and in the meantime I denied myself all the fine and good features that were built into that camera. So I suggest to you, it is with Jesus Christ. Some of us have never just taken the time to really understand what He's meant to do - -

how He's meant to operate in our lives.....the good that could be accomplished.

Now with Christmas just a few days away, He's coming - - - God has in mind exactly the kind of gift that you ought to have. God knows exactly what we need, and He wants us to make full use of it.

...I encourage you this year more than ever

to put Him on.....wear Him close to your heart

-- try Him.....you may get to like Him!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO CARE ENOUGH"

THERE WERE those, O God, who saw the
star, but did not follow. There were
those, O God, who heard angels sing,
but gave no heed. There were those,
O God, who saw a baby, but did not kneel
in adoration. O God, number us not
among them....

Ah, Dearest Jesus, Holy Child,
Make thee a bed, soft undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for thee.

Amen.

Let me begin this sermon tonight in a most unusual way, by saying a word
or two about the art of preaching. You see the preacher come to the sacred desk,
you wait to hear a sermon. Tell me, how does he go about it? Does he begin by
looking for a text? In the art of preaching, does the preacher search out for
a text? Nay, not so, my friend! He who is worth his salt as a preacher does
not go looking for a text -- he is found by a text. A text claims him. He
cannot have done with it.

I make bold to suggest to you that as I come to this sacred desk tonight
I am possessed by a text. I find it inescapable. It's the only text that seems
to me worthy of consideration on a night such as this -- the night and the text
go together. You'll recognize it. It's the most familiar of all the verses in
the New Testament. I will give you an abbreviated version:

"For God so loved . . . that He gave . . ."

That's the text.

Now if it's a title that you will be wanting, let me suggest this one:
"To Care Enough."

Now by way of introduction. Indulge me this night, will you? I want to
talk to you about someone who has meant a great deal to me. I will talk to you

very personally. I want to talk to you about my father, now of blessed memory.

Not very many of you got to know him, and if you'll forgive me, I'll tell you, I think you're the poorer because of it. He was, in my opinion, truly a remarkable man. He had a zest for life, and God was good to him, God gave him long years.

He was a keen student of human behavior. I still marvel as I remember how he could look at a person, read him like a book, even on short acquaintance, and in no time at all come to some valid assessment as to the worth or worthlessness of the individual.

He had come to these shores, as some of you know, from the Old Country. He was an oriental rug merchant. He never learned how to drive an automobile, and when I got my driver's license I would drive him around from village to village in north central Pennsylvania. People had come to know him from one generation to another, now selling to the grandchildren of the grandparents who were his first customers.....

What prompts my telling you this tonight is that I remember so well during the depression years, when he was about to make a sale, and then he backed off, and I heard him say to the customer who was about to buy a rug as a gift for a friend: "Really now, I don't think you ought to buy this, because it really doesn't represent the person!"

- - whether he was talking about the one who was going to do the buying, or whether he was talking about the giver, the difference is all the same, because when you deal in gifts, you have some indication as to the character of the person who is going to be on the receiving end.

Maybe you won't want to press this too far, but when you do unwrap those gifts tonight or tomorrow morning, those gifts are going to tell a great deal about the person who put your name on that package -- not only the kind of person

he is, but also perhaps what he may think of you. Gifts are that revealing. They tell something of the character of him who gives and of him who is meant to receive.

In company with most of you, I pay more than ordinary attention to the commercials that I hear on radio and on television. And in company with most of you, I find some of them absolutely inane, ridiculous. And on the other hand, some, I think, are downright clever, so much so that when I've heard some of them, I say to myself, I wish I'd been the one to have thought of that! -- particularly when I think of the handsome bonus that the creative chap ought to be getting for his clever promotional piece.

Among those that I prize -- shall I tell you? -- that greeting card firm: "When you care enough to send the very best" - - I think that's tops.

Now I say this to you quite facetiously.....if I were God, I think I'd sue the Hallmark people for plagiarism, because God in his own way could say to himself, "They've stolen my line, because that kind of thing originated with me," says God, "For I care enough to send the very best."

Now what do you do in this day and age when perhaps you feel you can't quite afford the gifts that you'd like to buy? For some people this is a very real problem. Pastor David tells me he had conversation with a member of this congregation who is in merchandising, and he was crying the blues, as well he might, because, said he, as far as the volume of business in his department alone, at this time of the year, they're \$30,000 behind last year. So what with recession, and inflation, the spiraling costs, one may think twice, or three times, before he buys a particular item. Only so much money to spend - - how can I get the best bargain, particularly if I want to send the very best?

But what I say to you, what would you do if you had no money with which to buy anything, and it was Christmas-time? What would you do, if there was such

a shortage of material that the stores were no longer stocked with merchandise, and it was Christmas-time, a time for giving? For that's where it originated, you know. God started it all. God thought it up. God so loved.....that He gave. What, then, becomes the standard for the ultimate?

Winifred, as some of you know, was a farm girl, and I hope she'll go on relating this to her grandsons some time. One year at Christmas they were snow-bound, The only real Christmas they had in that family that year was the Christmas made up of gifts that they had made for themselves. Now that's something to think about. But what constitutes the standard for the ultimate, when you care enough to give the very best? Can we take a line from God? How would He go about it? Basically speaking, when He gave His very best, He gave none other than Himself -- to meet the need of someone else.

I want to tell you a story now, a true story of course, and the central character is my favorite Roman Catholic Pope. You've heard me refer to him before. He was so human, he was so decent -- Pope John XXIII. I think so highly of him that on my desk, just a few feet away from where I'm standing now, in my study here at the church, I have a photograph of Angelo Rencalli, born to be Pope.

This happened long before he became Pope, it was when he was still a Cardinal, in Italy. And it was on Christmas Eve, mark you that and mark it well. He said to his monsignor, his secretary: "Now I think we should go look for him" - - that's the way the story begins, the Cardinal saying to the monsignor, his secretary, "Now I think we should go look for him." And the monsignor, the secretary, turned with a blank look on his face to his eminence and said, "For whom?" And the Cardinal turned and said, "You know.".....and then it dawned on him, and how well the monsignor, the secretary, knew the Cardinal. In recent time the Cardinal had taken to his own personal responsibility an alcoholic priest, and on Christmas Eve he was thinking of him.

So he said to the monsignor, "We'll go from tavern to tavern until we find him. You go inside and look, and I'll wait outside." So they went from tavern to tavern. Each time he seemed to come out disappointed, but then one time with a fair degree of hope on his face, he said, "I couldn't find him but I found a cassock on a hook."

...now a cassock, you know, is that long black

flowing garment that priests wear....

And bless his soul, the Cardinal brightened up a bit and said, "Well if there's a cassock on a hook, there's bound to be a priest somewhere. You go back and keep looking and don't come out without him." So back he went, going from table to table and corner to corner, and then he found him....in shirt sleeves, smoking away, a deck of cards in his hands...and a bottle by his side. The alcoholic priest was startled to see standing beside him the monsignor, the secretary to the Cardinal. The monsignor said, "We've come looking for you - - the Cardinal, he wants to see you."

"O, God," said the alcoholic priest, "in my condition? -- not now!" The monsignor said, "You know the Cardinal well enough to know he will not take no for an answer. He's waiting." With the greatest degree of reluctance the alcoholic priest stood up, staggered out. He was encountered by the Cardinal. The Cardinal looked him straight in the eye and said, "The confessor to whom I usually turn at this hour, when I need to make confession of my sin, is in bed. But I knew that you kept late hours, so I've come looking for you. I need to confess my sins."

And the alcoholic priest said, "But your Eminence, in my condition! - - I to hear your confession, the way I am?" And the good Cardinal said, "I need to confess my sins. Hear me! I will assume responsibility for your condition." So outside the tavern the Cardinal knelt, down on his knees, and made confession to an alcoholic priest. And when he received absolution, the Cardinal kissed the

hand of the alcoholic priest and said, "Now - now you know better who you are and what you're meant to be."

As the priest from that point on lived a life of sobriety, he recalled the event when the Cardinal had become Pope John XXIII, and he said, "Talk about a Christmas gift -- that for me was the ultimate." Of course! He had given his best. The Cardinal had given himself.

We Christians make much of the fact that God humbled Himself, stopped to our level, came looking for us. And then when we receive Him we hear ringing in our ears: "Now you know better who you are and what you were meant to be."

The purpose of this sermon is transparent, isn't it? The ultimate in giving is always when you can give yourself wrapped up in love. There is no finer gift. Wise indeed was that man, the business executive, who said, "This year I may give packages to my son, but then in addition to that he's going to be surprised." And so his son was. He found in an envelope a series of coupons, in his father's handwriting. One coupon read: "This coupon is good for one long hike on a Sunday afternoon with your dad".....another coupon: "This coupon is good for my undivided attention to you, no matter how difficult it may be for me to understand your situation."

Suppose we couldn't afford to buy anything at the store. Let me suggest to you the things that we can still afford to give:

- loyalty to those who depend on us
- faithfulness to those who trust us
- forgiveness to those who wrong us
- a generous spirit to those who think ill of us

....this is the ultimate in giving.

Bless Christina Rossetti's soul, she said it, and said it well:

"What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him --
Give my heart."

The most lamentable of all things that I ever heard in the confessional which is my study was from a man whose marriage had deteriorated. And as he turned and walked away, he simply said, "It isn't that she's not a good housekeeper - - it isn't that she isn't a good cook - - it isn't that she's unfaithful to me. But if only every now and then she'd treat me with a little bit of affection, as a human being."

The ultimate in giving -- God set the standard -- He treated us like human beings when He discovered the spark of divinity. That's why Christmas is forever.....

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)